Vinoba Bhave

# VINOBA AND HIS MISSION

*( Being an account of the growth and development of the Bhoodan Yagna movement )*

By

SURESH RAMABHAI

With A Foreword

By

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and

With an Introduction

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TO

MILLIONS OF MY

LANDLESS

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

WHO HAVE NEVER KNOWN A FULL MEAL

WHO ARE ENDOWED WITH EVERY TALENT

WHO FORM THE BACKBONE OF BHARAT-MATA

AND

WITHOUT WHOSE BETTERMENT

BOTH FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

ON PANCHAYATI AND DECENTRALISED LINES

WITH A RELIGIOUS AND COMRADELY SPIRIT

NOT AN INCH OF PROGRESS CAN

OUR INDIA

REALLY MAKE.

## FOREWORD

It is seven years since we won our political independence. It is a short span in a nation's life, but it is perhaps not less important than any other equal period. In the case of a human being, the period of the first seven years determines his character and so to a large extent his future. The same is perhaps true of a nation. There were many observers who forecast at the time of the transfer of power, that the Indian State would not be able to survive the effects of partition, that the country would get disorganised, that the administration would break down, that there would be no rule of law and no security of life and property. Many people feared and quite a few hoped for a sudden collapse. But these friends and foes have been confounded by the results. The country is held together. Instead of disintegration there has been integration. There is no part of the country where the writ of the Government does not run. The administration is still intact. A foreigner can travel from one end of the country to the other without the least insecurity of life and property. Even in international affairs our stand may not be generally accepted, but it is widely respected. We have earned a reputation for honesty and independence. Our achievements in the economic and social spheres have not been spectacular but they are not unsound.

It is not, however, for running things in the old routine ways, that we struggled for and achieved independence. Our aim is to bring about as speedily as possible a social and economic revolution. We wish to build a society free from caste and class, from exploitation of every kind, social and economic, racial and religious. We must admit that our society still suffers from grave economic injustices, social oppressions, caste prejudices, communal jealousies, provincial antagonisms and linguistic animosities. These are a challenge to our competence, our courage, our wisdom. If we are to survive as a civilised society, we have to get rid of these abuses as soon as possible and by civilised methods.

In the progress of societies three stages are marked, the

first where the law of the jungle prevails, where we have the operation of selfishness and violence ; the second, where we have the rule of law and impartial justice with courts, police and prisons ; the third where we have non-violence and unselfishness, where love and law are one. The rule of the jungle, the rule of law, the rule of love—these mark the three stages of social progress. The last is the goal of civilised humanity, and it can be brought nearer by the increase in the numbers of men and women who have renounced selfish ambition, surrendered personal interest, who die daily that others may live in peace and comfort. The good people sustain the world by their austere life. *Santo bhūmin tapasa dhārayanti.* In Achārya Vinoba Bhave we have one such *tapasvin* who is striving to introduce the law of love in our social and economic life.

It is because we cannot make all the people prophets that we have to depend on legislation to bring about changes in our social order. The Bhoodan movement acquires great significance in this context of urgent change. It underlines traditions that are implicit in the Indian way of life. It recaptures the idea of the social order as the family writ large. It appeals to our religious instinct that spiritual freedom can be attained only by those who are not attached to material possessions. The movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave is potentially revolutionary in character. The response to his appeal which has come from all levels of the social order shows that the moral reserves of our country are large. The movement is based on an act of faith. Even if it does not by itself bring about an agrarian revolution, it prepares for it by producing a climate of opinion in which courageous methods of land reform can be put through.

Shri Suresh Ramabhai has written a moving account of the way in which Shri Vinoba Bhave was led to this movement and the progress it has made. It should be read by all who are interested in this unique camapign, its objects and its philosophy.

New Delhi,
31/3/'54.

**S. Radhakrishnan**

## INTRODUCTION

Those who understand and know something about it have no doubt of the great significance of the *bhoodan* movement. But unfortunately among the city-dwelling educated classes there are not many who have such knowledge and understanding. The need was, therefore, keenly felt for a simple presentation of this movement, particularly in the English language. There is quite a respectable volume of literature on *bhoodan* produced in most of the Indian languages, but, except for a booklet published by the Navajivan Publishing House, there is very little available in the English language on this subject. It is, therefore, a matter of gratification that Shri Suresh Ramabhai has tried to fulfill this need.

Suresh Ramabhai is not only a writer who has looked at the movement from the outside but is an "insider", because he has himself travelled from village to village collecting *bhoodan*. He has also a Gandhian training, apart from his Mathematics in which he took his M.Sc. degree, and is an indefatigable Khadi spinner.

His present book is divided into three parts. The first deals with Vinobaji's life and the background of the *bhoodan* movement. In Part II, he has traced the origin and progress of the movement from Telangana to Gaya. In this he has followed the simple technique of following Vinobaji from State to State and showing chronologically the progress and development of the movement. His narrative is punctuated with generous quotations from Vinobaji's speeches and writings through which the reader will find the unfolding thread of his thought. Even if this detailed description of Vinobaji's trek through the country does not interest the casual reader, it is good that the story of this remarkable journey has been told in a connected manner. Thus must have Buddha, Mahavir, Shankar and the ancient Rishis walked through the land teaching their message.

In part III, Suresh Ramabhai has dealt with the philosophy and technique of this non-violent social and human revolution. Again, he has relied largely on quotations from Vinobaji's own sayings.

I am sure this book would give the reader a comprehensive view of this great movement and its great significance for human society, particularly at the present juncture when terrific weapons of violence are threatening its very existence.

Gaya,
30th March, 1954.

**Jayaprakash Narayan**

## PREFACE

It is with considerable diffidence that I present these pages to the reader : the subject they deal with being so vast and penetrating that it is difficult to do full justice to it in the brief space of a book like this. The task is made harder by the fact that Vinoba is incessantly growing, and growing rapidly ; virtually, every moment he is casting off his old shell and being born anew. No doubt the world has come to recognize him largely through his Bhoodan Yagna movement. But his personality is too unfathomable to be expressed, much less measured, in its dry terms alone. Perhaps an exact and sincere delineation of the same may be beyond the ken of any one, except, of course, Vinoba himself. Maybe it is also irrelevant for Vinoba believes, though many dare not share his view, that man's is to dissolve his river of life into and be one with the waters of the Great Ocean and that the world is sustained not so much by the great works of our great ones whom we know as by the greater works of our greater ones whom we know not. I, therefore, confess that it is almost tyrannical to venture to submit such a deep-seated life or its mission to cold words or print. I am quite conscious of my limitations to make any such claim.

In the following pages I have confined myself to giving some glimpses of the rise and growth of the Bhoodan Yagna movement during the last three years — its opening up of new floodgates of light and activity before an indolent populace with a frustrated leadership, its emphasis on the eternally green and responsive chords in the heart of man, and its promise to provide the humanity with a force with which it can successfully face every might or arms, howsoever hideous. Though it is well-nigh impossible to demarcate between the subjective and objective aspects of the influences and repercussions produced by a movement, specially of the type of the Bhoodon mevement in India, it is essentially the latter in whose background

one can estimate the real worth of that movement. They are the grim realities of the terrible situtation in modern India which can convince one of the need and efficacy of the Bhoodan Yagna movement. Any student of current affairs will testify to the truth of these realities—the poor of the country getting progressively poorer and the rich correspondingly richer, the widening rift between the ruling authority and the ruled, the rising infiltration of foreign capital and goods, the crushing fall of our indigenous arts and crafts, the increasing distaste towards hard labour and self-restraint, the deepening chasm between castes and sub-castes and between brother and brother, etc., etc. The political parties of the country are unfortunately more interested in retaining power ( if they have it ) or in acquiring it ( if they have not ) than in sharing the people's weal and woe. I have come across some very painful cases of their callous indifference to the plight of the underdog. Whether our political parties; as we find them today, are constitutionally capable of doing otherwise, is a serious and debatable proposition. In these circumstances I feel that of all plans or pragrammes in India, Bhoodan offers a lamp whose light helps us to wade our way through in the penumbra of the darkness enveloping the country today. Note, Bhoodan is no panacea for all ills. But it is a lamp certainly brighter and more effective than any other available at present. Should somebody offer a light, better and more soothing, it would surely be resorted to. But today there is, to my mind, none save Bhoodan.

As these pages will reveal, Bhoodan's object is not to obtain land here and distribute it there. Its real purpose is to transform the society and the man anew by creating. what Vinoba aptly calls, *Jan-Shakti* (जनशक्ति or self-reliant power of the people ). Here one is reminded of what Gandhiji wrote in his Last Will and Testament to the Nation. He prophetically observed :

> "India has still to attain social, moral and economic idependence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns.

The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies."

It is easy to see that the official machinery in India, the big business, the Army, and the allied agencies and forces serve only to strengthen the 'military power' above. Presently they seem to be gaining ascendancy, which bids very ill for our country. But the civil power has also, of late, begun to appear, the Bhoodan movement providing the best medium for its quick generation. True that, except in Bihar and parts of Orissa, Bhoodan has not yet taken the form of a popular movement all over the country, yet its progress from zero to one (the total land collected in the country during the last three years amounts to more than 32 lakhs of acres, *i. e.*, about one per cent of the total cultivable land in India) bears out that given sincere effort and firm resolve, it can produce enough *Jan-Shakti* so as to give rise to a civil force through which our masses can undoubtedly achieve their own *Raj*. And it is in this light that I request the reader to approach the Bhoodan Yagna movement and examine its implications and potentialities with an open mind and large heart.

Divided into three parts, the book deals with the background ( together with a brief life-sketch of Vinoba ), of the Bhoodan Yagna movement, its birth and growth, and its philosophy and technique. It covers the period upto the end of March, 1954. Since then has happened another memorable event in the annals of Bhoodan, the Bodh-Gaya session of the Sarvodaya Samaj, which is likely to be regarded as a great landmark in the history of our country. A brief account of this epoch-making event is given in the end as Appendix (G). Other items in the Appendix include Gandhiji's memorable writing introducing Vinoba to the world on the occasion of the Individual Satyagraha movement in October 1940, resolutions passed at the Sevapuri and Chandil sessions of the Sarvodaya Samaj, rules and regulations of land-distribution, certain important sections

of the Bhoodan Act passed in Madhya Pradesh, and the pledge of Sampatti Dan Yagna. Besides, there are eleven tables depicting the movement at its various stages, which would, it is hoped, add to the usefulness of the book.

It is my pleasant duty to record my warm appreciation of the help and encouragement I have received in the course of this work. I am obliged to Sris Shrikrishnadas Jaju, Dhirendra Mazumdar, Dada Dharmadhikari, Anna Sahasrabuddhe, Lakshmi Narain (Lakshmi Babu of Bihar), Krishnadas Gandhi, Akshaya Kumar Karan, Siddharaj Dhaddha, Thakurdas Bang, D. J. Hatekar and Devendra Gupta, for their critical and thoughtful suggestions. I desire to thank Sris R. S. Dhotre, Vallabhswami and N. Ramaswami for their helpful sympathy and going through portions of manuscript. I wish also to acknowledge my obligations to Sris Jivanji D. Desai and Krishnaraj Mehta; to the former, of the Navajivan Publishing House, for permitting me to draw freely from Bapu or Vinoba's writings and speeches found in *Young India* and *Harijan*, and to the latter, of Sarv Seva Sangh, for his kindly interest in the preparation and publication of this book.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has laid me under a special debt of gratitude by acceding to my request for a Foreword. And I am deeply indebted, above all, to Sri Jayaprakash Babu who has patiently gone through the manuscript twice ( once alone and once with me in his Bhoodan tour, ) liberally offered valuable suggestions and prolific advice, and added an Introduction.

Finally, I would deem my labours amply rewarded if they could succeed in focussing the attention of our educated brethren towards the cause of our landless millions to whom this book is gratefully dedicated.

Allahabad,
April 28, 1954.

Suresh Ramabhai

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# V I N O B A

# AND HIS MISSION

An unrivalled spinner.

# PART I

# LIFE AND BACKGROUND

## CHAPTER I

# AMIDST THE ENCIRCLING GLOOM

About the middle of 1947 the British Parliament passed an enactment partitioning India into two—India and Pakistan, and conferring upon them self-government, absolving itself of all responsibilities in the newly created States. It meant a withdrawal of the British political authority from India. In our country, the goods were delivered on August 15, 1947, to the Congress party which has since been holding the reins of power both at the Centre and in the provinces ( now called States ). In accordance with the new Constitution of India, adopted on January 26, 1950, country-wide elections were held in December 1951–January 1952 in which, again, the Congress party was returned to power with a large majority. With every adult, male or female, having the right to exercise his or her vote, about seventeen crores of people went to the polls to elect their own representatives. The right to vote notwithstanding, it did not bring about any change in the status quo. For the legal postulates defining the basis of our constitution, as in any other 'democratic' state, are but the incidents of the standing class-relations in which reigns supreme an economic oligarchy working on the profit system derived from private ownership. In sober fact, the Government of India remains the executive instrument of the class in society which owns the means as well as resources of production and wealth. So the new Republic of India

secured political freedom for India as a whole but not for the masses. It continues to be the exclusive preserve of a bureaucracy controlling the production-resources, again, as elsewhere too.

The British occupation of India was both political and economic. Nay, it was essentially economic and it was political to the extent to which it protected their economic interests. Surely, British economic interests govern the British political policy, resulting in the establishment of a long chain of British possessions stretching from Gibraltar in the Mediterranean, *via* Suez, Aden and Singapore, to the far off Australia. Incredible as it may appear, the republican India has as yet not only not succeeded in making British financial and commercial interests quit India but finds them further enthroned. Another vital and active player appearing on the Indian scene is the American capital which, through its hosts of experts and advisers, is fast penetrating itself in Indian economy. American inspired "Community Projects" and "National Extension Service", American controlled Indian combines or factories and American (exclusive) concerns are spreading their sway on our markets and homes. In this connection it is worth-while to reproduce two clauses from the text of the 'Indo—American Technical Co-operation Agreement', signed between the Governments of India and U. S. A. in January 1952 :

> (1) He (the American Government's representative or the Director of Technical Co-operation) and his staff shall be a part of the diplomatic mission of the U. S. Government in India and shall share fully in the privileges and immunities enjoyed by that mission and its personnel.
>
> (2) "The two Governments will establish procedures whereby the Government of India will so deposit, segregate or assure title to all funds allocated to or derived from any programme of assistance undertaken by the U. S. Government, that such funds shall not be subject to garnishment, attachment, seizure or other legal process by any person, firm,

agency, corporation, organization or Government when in the opinion of the U. S. Government any such legal process would interfere with the attainment of the objectives of such programme of assistance."

American expansion in India under such undreamt of concessions has strongly roused public opinion which was perhaps most succinctly given expression to by Acharya K. G. Mashruwala. Writing about the said 'Agreement', he remarked :

> "It is virtually a charter to U. S. to establish herself in India, first as a trading concern, and then as India's political boss. The Government of India has agreed to place at the disposal of U. S. all its administrative machinery and to become her advertising agency. U. S. officers, employers etc. will be allowed to live in India and move and mix with the people here without being subject to even civil laws of India. Who can prevent them from propagating any political or social views they please, and creating factions in India ?"

Deeply linked with and dependent on the British big business is the Indian big business. The latter, a new phenomenon since the Great War I, is verily a younger cousin of the former. During the non-co-operation days it took full advantage of the freedom struggle and made a good headway, though in no way approaching its white brother. Even today the Indian business is not resourceful or strong enough to stand completely on its own feet and has, therefore, entered into equal or unequal partnership with foreign business (British or American). Perhaps this continued dependence of the Indian big business on the foreign one is very largely responsible for letting the latter remain intact in free India. But it needs no prophetic vision to state that with the lapse of time would deepen the Americo-British economic occupation of India which only a strong Government, serving interests other than those as the one now, could overthrow. It amounts in substance to the substitution of the visible political slavery by an invisible alien economic domination.

As observed above, the State is serving a definite class interest. To earn more profit this class seeks to extend its activities by setting up more heavy machinery to produce such articles of daily consumption as can be made by the villager himself. In other words, it brings about a ruin of the Indian house-craft or cottage industry, crushing the cunning of the hand or the art of the village. It has actually led to tremendous unemployment in the countryside, making the village weaver, oilman, tanner, spinner, shoemaker, potter, etc., all idle, and progressively so. Our village self-sufficiency whose foundations were wrecked by the British rulers, seems to be getting, as it were, the last kicks during the long-coveted home-rule.

Yet another misfortune. Inspite of all official support and foreign backing, Indian big business finds that our country is becoming a " high–cost producer in precisely those branches of production where her supremacy had been established by the low cost of management, and her position as an exporter of jute manufactures, cotton piece-goods, coal and plantation products has been weakened by rising cost of production ", which is mostly attributable to wages and other increases in labour–remuneration. The Indian industry must, it is argued, therefore, reduce cost which it can do either by paying labour less or retrenching it. As the former is not a practical proposition (for judged by ordinary standards, Indian labour even now is very poorly paid) the latter is the only course which is termed as "rationalization" in industrial circles. Without installing improved machinery requiring less hands the cost is not likely to go down. This implies retrenchment and greater retrenchment, which means further mounting up of the heap of the unemployed.

Unemployment seems to grip not only the uneducated or unskilled labourers but also the educated and skilled labourers. The problem of the educated unemployed is assuming alarming proportions, and has become an ugly and running sore. But, manifestly, India Government is hardly likely to succeed where the gigantic, resourceful and colonial Governments like those of U. S., U. K. and France, are not able to

pull their way through. Rising unemployment and aggravating ruin of our cottage industries are intimately connected with the frequent recurrence of famines or scarcity conditions in several parts of the country.

The social status of an individual is very much a reflection of his economic position. The deteriorating economic condition of a very large mass of the population, specially of the poorer sections, has further countenanced social disparities. The Harijan, though by law equal in status to any one else, is almost as outlawed as ever. Isolated humanitarian attempts to mix him with the scheduled castes are only an exception to the general untouchability practice. Besides, the rift between the rich and the poor has gone wider and more prominent.

No less painful is the situation in the administrative sphere. Honesty and industry seem to be at a discount in our present administration. Here is the view of Sri A. D. Gorwala, a retired I. C. S. officer and an acknowledged authority in this sphere :

> " In all the circumstances it would not be wrong to conclude the Government is not deeply concerned about clear or impartial administration. Is Government in this country really anxious to stamp out corruption ? Obviously not. "

Thus in the different walks of our national life today, after more than six years of political freedom, the position of the man on the street has not only not improved but definitely worsened in many a regard. The result is frustration, despondency and dissatisfaction in general, a consequent disinclination to apply oneself devotedly to any serious objective. The various political parties or the leaders have no solution for the sad crisis engulfing us all today. And India presents the woeful spectacle of an unfortunate, inert owner who refuses to work up and till his newly acquired piece of land. At a time when we should have been marching like one man we are frittering away our energies in trifles, disputes and tamashas.

In the world outside a cold war is on. It is divided into two blocs, the capitalist led by U. S. A. and the communist led by U. S. S. R. The former, out for world domination ( as is its wont ), is seeking new colonies ( economic if not directly political ) or strengthening, in keeping with its past, unwanted colonial regimes to pass over the crisis at home and perfecting instruments of destruction to maintain its hold and position. The latter, not as much suffering from economic or social disabilities, is trying to expand and is arming itself to the teeth in order to stabilise the situation within and without. The moral sympathy of the large, dispossessed, masses of the globe, suffering as they are from hunger and poverty, is with the latter. Both talk of peace but prepare for war. Peace suffers. For, while the one bloc is interested in it only inasmuch as it can help preserve its economic oligarchy, the other, behaving like an armed vigil anxious to do away with vultures likely to seize a carcass, is not ready to bury the carcass for good. Thus both worship the same Mammon and a race in armaments goes on unabatedly in which the greatest casualty is the personality of the individual or the being of man as Man.

The Government of India is trying to keep off from the two blocs and establish a third area away from conflict. A laudable venture indeed ! An area, however, requires some force to sustain it so that it may survive direct and indirect onslaughts from within or without. It is no more possible for an area to thrive without a force as for an atom to do without a nucleus. But the nature and quality of force sought to be developed by the Indian authority are of the same category as of those resorted to by other Governments or powers. All of our plans and projects bear the imprint of alien designs. Human values are almost conspicuous by their absence. A growing gulf between the rulers and the ruled as also between the high and the low is a natural consequence. A strange gloom encircles the land.

In this morbid state of affairs, there seems to be in our country but one man who, unmoved by the dazzling expanse of money or machine, untouched by the excitement and

passion for pleasure or speed, undisturbed by the dark rage and fear of power or pomp, is devoted to his duty with a spirit content in itself, with an intelligence stable and settled, and with an ardour deep and sublime. For more than three decades past, he has been humbly consuming himself at the altar of the nation's real liberty. When the British departed from the Indian political stage he was, as ever before, carrying on at Paunar in Wardha district his silent constructive activities which included clearing latrines and lanes of a village. Soon after departed Gandhiji under whose spiritual shadow he had grown all these years. A voice from within exhorted him to enlarge the physical domain of the field of his work and render it vast and sweeping in consonance with its far-spreading social, mental and moral empire. Accordingly, Vinoba, as he is known, came out of his voluntary seclusion. Within six years now he has developed into India's most popular character, almost a legend.

## CHAPTER II

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Curiously enough little is known of the life-history of Vinoba. Nor does he encourage his biographers. As he himself says, most of his real life has been lived rather within than without and if his life story is to be written he has to write it himself. Like Mahatma Gandhi's *Experiments with Truth,* Vinoba's autobiography, if and when it comes to light, will be the inspiring story of the pilgrimage of a soul in constant communion with itself and ceaselessly moving onward to the only objective of merging itself into the Universal Being.

Descending from a Brahmin family of Maharashtra, Vinoba was born on September 11, 1895 at the village of Gagode in the Pen Tehsil (sub-division) of Kolaba district of Bombay Presidency. His mother, Rukmini Devi, was a deeply pious, devout woman and father, Sri Narhar Shambhurao Bhave, a textile technologist, was very scrupulous, methodical and straightforward, of stern character and discipline. As his father was in service in the Baroda State, now merged in the State of Bombay, Vinoba passed a large part of his childhood with his grandfather, Sri Shambhurao Bhave. Sri Shambhurao, a very pure and devout soul, commanded a great reputation and authority in the locality. As Vinoba says, it was the pious Shambhurao who was largely responsible in giving a religious trend to his life.

Of his parents' five children, Vinoba is the first-born. The younger, Sri Balkova is now running the Nature-cure clinic, founded by Mahatma Gandhi, at Uruli Kanchan near Poona. The third, Sri Shivaji Bhave, who has developed himself as philologist and a deep scholar of saints' literature is an authority on Vinoba's writings. The fourth was a sister, Shantabai who after leading a married life for a few years, passed away at a young age. Dutta was the youngest who

breathed his last in his childhood. Like Vinoba, his two brothers, Balkova and Shivaji are also unmarried and have adopted a life of service and renunciation.

Vinoba had his early education at his home in nature's surroundings, at Gagode. He was a voracious reader. But he read nothing that he did not digest and enjoy. He was also quite fond of newspapers, among which he read out *Kesari*, the well—known mouth—piece of Lokmanya Tilak, to his mother regularly. It is the mother who has contributed the largest in his make-up. From her, he, Vinya, as she called him, developed his wonderful asceticism and taste for dedication and self-effacement. Whatever she did she dedicated it to God and always shared her household preparations with her neighbours, the duty of distribution being enjoined upon her beloved Vinya. An extremly religious and devoted woman, with the songs of saints on her lips, she lived a very godly and quiet ideal family life.

Until 1905, Vinoba's father lived in Baroda alone. Then he called his family and sent Vinoba to the Primary School where he completed two years' course. Next his father, tempramentally a teacher as he was, taught him English, Mathematics, etc. for three years. In 1910, Vinoba began regular school life as a student of the IV English Standard. In the beginning he fared very creditably in his class tests and examinations. But as his extra-curricular studies widened his course—work suffered, though he passed alright. Apart from the writings and utterances of Maharashtra's saints, he devoured nationalistic and political literature.

Besides literature, Vinoba was fond of Mathematics. It is the exactness of Mathematics which has become a part of his life. And he has remained a mathematician all his life, for he does nothing unless he satisfies himself by weighing its pros and cons fully and making close calculations about it. Which is why there is no wastage about him and he has dreamt no dream that was not realised.

Passing his Matric in November, 1913, Vinoba joined the Intermediate. But he was not content with his life and ever

since 1911 was thinking of leaving home for good and giving himself up to something higher. Two years of the class Intermediate were of intense inner agitation and suffering.

One day, early in 1916, he was sitting by his mother who was cooking food. He had some rolled papers in his hands. He lit fire to one at its end. It began to burn. Mother asked him what he was doing. He replied that he was reducing his school and college certificates to ashes. She suggested that they might prove useful if required in future. Out came the unequivocal answer, "No, now that I have decided to leave the college I will never require them. So why keep them with me?" It was a fateful decision.

On his way to Bombay in March 1916 to appear in the Intermediate examination, Vinoba detrained at Surat, took the train to Bhusaval and left for Benares. To his close friends who asked him what was the inner urge that impelled him to this course of action, he replied, "अथातो ब्रह्म जिज्ञासा" (longing to attain Brahma, the Imperishable and All-Pervading). This desire to become part and parcel of the Eternal Self, *i. e.*, to reduce himself to zero, has been the single passion of Vinoba's life. He so wants to eliminate himself that his any and every action may be reduced to non-action. Hence his at once original and bold interpretation of the word विकर्म (Vikarma) occurring in the Gita (Chapter IV, Verse 17) as 'specific action', contrary to the usual interpretation of 'wrong action', whereof he has found the illustrious formula: कर्म (action) + विकर्म (specific action) = अकर्म (inaction or non-action). His utter humility in claiming no authorship or entity for himself is remarkably shown in the few couplets which he has written by way of introduction to his Marathi rendering of Gandhiji's pious, charming, little book *Mangal Prabhat.* He has called it अभंग व्रतें. The first couplet of that introduction runs thus :

प्रेरणा परमात्म्याची महात्म्याची प्रसन्नता
वाणी संतकृपेची ही विन्याची कृतिशून्यता ।

( Inspired by God, graced by Mahatmaji, I 'messenger like' but speak the language emanating from the saints. Nothing of Vinya is in this. )

And in the last, fifth, his feeling of reduction to zero reaches almost its climax :

अद्वितीयच्चि एकत्व गुरूचे गौरवूनिजे<br>
विन्या शून्य विनाभूत फावला गणितापरी ।

( Vinya is like the non-being zero of Mathematics. The master or *guru* is one and unique whose esteem grows by the addition of zeros.)

This verse may be regarded to contain the key to Vinoba's life.

To resume our story, during the few years he was at Baroda, Vinoba gathered up more jewels of literature and making them as his own, he established an intimate contact with the immortal great whose company he continued to keep ever after. His memory being strong, sayings after sayings of Maharashtra saints were committed to his memory and he thus created for himself a spirituo-intellectual realm. His study helped him immensely later to translate the Sanskrit *Gita* into *Gitai* in the form of parallel Marathi couplets. When I requested him one day to find time and translate the *Gita* into Hindi as well, he replied, "Well, I can't do that, for I have not read your Hindi saints except Tulsidas, that too only his *Ramayana* and *Vinaya Patrika*. As regards Marathi, I had mugged up all I could lay hands upon long long ago."

From his early years Vinoba has been fond of walking. In Baroda, he, with his few friends, used to walk three to four hours and cover ten or twelve miles a day. Walking and reading can be said to be his main two occupations. In the Baroda State Library he was a familiar figure, with his *Kurta* hanging down the shoulder.

Roamed as Vinoba did in a world of his own, he was rather averse to organisational work and activities. On a Diwali day in 1914, his friend and companion, Sri Raghunath Sridhar Dhotre (renowned secretary of the Gandhi Seva Sangh and now secretary of the All-India Gandhi National Memorial Fund and Trust) took the initiative in founding the *Vidyarthi Mandal*, a sort of study circle. Vinoba promised

every co-operation but refused to accept any executive post with the remarks, "Making me the organiser of some institution or programme is like appointing Tukaram to the post of a bank manager." Hence Vinoba's characteristic aloofness from all groups, parties or organisations.

The year 1916 marks the close of one chapter of Vinoba's life and the commencement of another. He had left college studies for all time. What to do next to meet the inner urge was the question. But he was sure of one thing—for a vision of the Divine everything had to be dedicated unto Him, as also for true national service. With this resolve to sacrifice all unto His feet, he came to Benares. He began studying Sanskrit. He also contacted political workers and terrorists but was soon disillusioned. For they did not reach his standard of dedication and renunciation. But he was very much attracted by a speech which was the talk of the town. It was Mahatma Gandhi's historic address before a princely audience in the newly founded Benares Hindu University, in which he had asked the princes of India to go and sell their jewels. Vinoba got a report of it from the newspapers. Immediately he wrote a letter about it, touching both religion and politics, to the Mahatma who gave a prompt reply. Vinoba sent a rejoinder and was again replied. His restless soul remaining unpacified, he penned down a third letter. Then Gandhiji wrote back to him that such riddles as raised by him could not be solved through correspondence alone and that he would advise him (Vinoba) to come to the Kocharab Ashram (then recently started by Gandhiji) for detailed talk. Immediately Vinoba left for Kocharab and thus his stay at Benares was cut short to three months only. On Wednesday, June 7, 1916, he met Mahatma Gandhi. Never was held a more epoch-making meeting. Their eyes discovered them and a relationship was established which no distance of time or space could efface. Vinoba was a full-fledged member of the Ashram.

Vinoba had gone to the Ashram with an inner resolve to behave as जड़ भरत (inert Bharat), again an expression of his ambition to become zero. He would quietly perform the

duties given to him and maintain utter calm. But the evening prayer was followed by some study, discussions or questions and answers. There Vinoba happened to ask some questions, though very rarely. They, however, revealed the man that he was, completely above the average and of a different mould altogether. They of the Ashram soon began to admire and love him, and requested him to do some teaching work for their sake. He willingly took it up. Shortly after Bapu came to know that he (Vinoba) had not informed about his movements to his parents. He wrote to Vinoba's father at Baroda a brief letter himself:

> "Your son Vinoba is with me. Your son has acquired at so tender an age such highspiritendness and asceticism as took of me years of patient labour to."

What a great tribute!

But somehow Vinoba's health in the Ashram declined. So Vinoba took one year's leave. Bapu agreed. Exactly a year after, down to the very minute, Vinoba produced himself back before the master. Bapu had almost forgotten it. But he was very much moved by so scrupulous execution of a promise. Recalling the event one day, he said to Vinoba, "It showed your loyalty to truth." Humbly Vinoba observed, "Rather, it was my loyalty to Mathematics." Bapu smiled, "Can Mathematics ever betray truth?"

Vinoba spent half of his leave days at Wai where in the *Prajna Pathshala* of the renowned Sanskrit scholar, Sri Narayan Shastri Marathe, he attended lectures on *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya* of Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya's *Gita Bhashya* is Vinoba's almost constant companion. Perhaps of all thinkers, none has influenced Vinoba so much as Shankaracharya.

The other six months were spent in going round the countryside and propagating knowledge (ज्ञान प्रचार). What Vinoba actually did during these 12 months is, thanks to Mahadev Desai, on record. On February 10, 1918, he wrote a long letter to Bapu giving full details of his studies

and activities. This letter was preserved by Mahadevbhai and forms a part of the latter's diary. During this period, Vinoba studied the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Manusmriti*, the *Patanjal Yoga Darshan* and read through the *Nyaya Sutra*, *Vaisheshik Sutra* and *Yagya Valka Smriti.*

Perhaps the most daring work of Vinoba at Wai was to conduct a corn-grinding class in which he and his friends ground wheat and other cereals into flour. They searched out men who carried their wheat to the mill. They grounded it themselves at the rate of two seers a pice. Many of them were High School students who never did such things. Yet the class continued for two months during which they all earned so much as fetched a good number of books for their common reading room.

Concluding his letter, Vinoba wrote :

> " To the best of my ability, I have tried to observe our Ashram rules.
>
> " What else may I say ? Will He make me a fit instrument of His service ? This one desire dominates my thought even in my dreams....
>
> " Vinoba earnestly presses for—he who regards himself as your son—entreats of you a reply in your own hand. "

Reading the said letter, Bapu remarked that the disciple had surpassed the master and that Vinoba was a veritable Bhim ( giant or Hercules ). In his reply Bapu wrote :—

> " I don't know what epithet to use in respect of you. Your love and character overwhelm me. I am not competent to judge you. You have tried yourself and I accept your judgement as mine. I accept the position of father you have asked me to. You come very near fulfilling my expectations of you. I hold that a truthful father produces a more truthful son than himself. A true son is he who carries forward the father's work. If the father be truthful, resolute and kind, the son inherits these qualities in a more pronounced degree. I see you have done

so. I feel they have come to you through no efforts of mine. I, therefore, accept the position of father you have offered me as a gift of love. And I shall try to deserve it. If I prove a Hirnakashyap, you must prove a Prahlad.

" You are right. You have scrupulously kept the Ashram observances even out of it....May God give you long life. May He make of you an instrument of service to Hind ! That is my prayer...."

A prayer, so noble and genuine, could not possibly remain unfulfilled.

On returning to the Sabarmati Ashram, Vinoba participated in the usual activities of the Ashram. But his special work was teaching in the *Rashtriya Shala* ( National School ). He was also called to give lectures in the Gujarat Vidyapith, then recently started.

Another important event in Vinoba's life, occurring about this time ( 1918 ) was the death of his dear and revered mother. Baroda was ravaged by a terrible influenza epidemic. At Bapu's bidding Vinoba went there to be at his mother's service. Reaching home he found both the parents as also the youngest brother, Dutta, ill. The last was to go first and three days later the mother also passed away, while the father slowly recovered. Vinoba expressed a desire that the funeral hymns should not be chanted by the professional priest. His father pleaded helplessness. So Vinoba did not participate in the funeral ceremony and spent the day in reciting the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* at home.

On January 14, 1921, a branch of the Satyagraha Ashram ( Sabarmati ) was started at Wardha, at Seth Jamnalal Bajaj's persuasion, under the supervision of Sri Ramniklal Modi. But on account of ill-health, Sri Modi could not stay there long. So Bapu asked Vinoba to take up its charge. Vinoba readily consented and on 6th April 1921, he left Sabarmati for Wardha. His old Baroda friend, Sri Raghunath

* Prahlad, the ideal legendary Satyagrahi of India, was maltreated by his athiest father, Hiranakashyap, for his God-intoxication.

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Dhotre accompanied him as also five students of the *Shala*. Of these five, mention must be made of two— Sri Krishnadas Gandhi (former Secretary of the All-India Spinners' Association) and Sri Vallabhji Bhagwanji Patel, popularly known as Vallabhswami, now joint secretary of the All-India Sarv Seva Sangh. Sri Vallabhswami, an ardent disciple of Vinoba, is among the most respected and loved constructive workers of the younger generation.

Reaching Wardha on April 8, 1921, Vinoba came to the Satyagraha Ashram, located in what is now known as Maganvadi. After some three months, the Ashram was shifted to Bajajwadi where it continued till the end of 1923. Early in 1924, the Ashram was shifted to the new and permanent spot, now called *Mahila Ashram*. In 1923, Vinoba brought about a Marathi monthly, *Maharashtra Dharma*, which was unique in that every word of its 48 pages, containing serious first-class matter, came from Vinoba's pen. But only four issues appeared as Vinoba went away to jail on account of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha movement. Later it came out as a weekly and continued for about three years.

Vinoba's activities from 1921 to 1947 may be regarded as researches both of a soul-physicist in the laboratory of his self and that of a cottage-chemist in that of his Ashram-village. The former took him to cosmic spiritual heights, while the latter found expression in the enrichment of the various items of Gandhiji's constructive programme, specially Khadi, village industries, *Nai Talim* and *Safai* (sanitation and hygiene). On 25th December 1932, he shifted to Nalwadi, a village about two miles from Wardha town, where he resolved to support himself by spinning work alone and he span for hours on end, going deep into the various aspects of Khadi craft. Illness overtook him and he was advised to go to the hills for rest. He told Bapu that he had chosen his own hill station—a desolated hillock-like piece of land by the side of Paunar river, some five miles from the Wardha town, where Seth Jamnalal had built for himself a country-house. Vinoba gave it the meaningful name of *Paramdham Ashram* which has remained his headquarters ever since.

Again it was from Wardha that Vinoba took his silent part in political campaigns of Gandhiji. He was among the moving spirits of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha of 1923, his other companions being Seth Jamnalal, Mahatma Bhagwandin, Sri Ganpatrao Tikekar and Sri Nilkanthrao Deshmukh. In connection with a memorable speech which he delivered at Nagpur on 17th June, 1923, Vinoba, together with Sri Dhotre, was arrested and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment. It was his first experience of jail life. On an interview day, when some friends came to see him they inquired how things in the jail were. With his characterstic frankness, Vinoba replied, "Well, you must have seen a circus. There, men guide and control animals. A jail is exactly the reverse; here animals guide and control men!" The jail authorities, present on the occasion, simply blushed at the great truth. From Nagpur jail, Vinoba and Sri Dhotre were transferred to Akola Jail. They were released on 20th September 1923. Immediately on reaching the Ashram at Bajajwadi, in the early hours of the morning, Vinoba rejoined his work as usual, as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

An important event of Akola Jail needs special mention. Before Vinoba reached the place, political prisoners refused to work, particularly those who were sentenced to simple imprisonment. Vinoba appealed to their good sense and explained to them that food without work was sin. He prevailed upon all of them to regard it as God's rare blessing that they had an opportunity of learning the art of useful physical labour which they should whole-heartedly acquire. The entire lot of political prisoners was moved and began working. The jail authorities called it a Vinoba-made magic.

In 1924, Bapu sent Vinoba to Vaikom (Travancore) to guide and supervise the Harijan temple-entry Satyagraha. Sri Vallabhswami accompanied Vinoba in this pilgrimage.

Sometime after, Vinoba prepared a plan to spread a net of *Gram Seva* (village service) work near about Wardha, covering all the 300 villages of the Wardha taluka. Several of his students and co-workers took to this work and different villages were allotted to them. Vinoba maintained his contact

with these villages right upto the beginning of 1948. It was during this time that Vinoba practised the arts of a farmer, spinner, weaver and scavenger. And, of course, he is a born teacher. He adorns whatever he touches. He has remained throughout a student in the highest sense of the term.

In 1932, on Gandhiji's return from the Round Table Conference, Vinoba happened to be at Jalgaon ( Khandesh ). He was pained to see terror gripping the general people. He decided to address a public meeting. He did it wherein he made a plea for fearlessness and self–help and assured that the British rule would not, and could not, stay long. This took him to jail where he was tried and convicted for six months. He passed his sentence at Dhulia Jail.

Again, on return from jail Vinoba took to his *Gram Seva* work. Vinoba's ambition to destroy his ego and turn into a zero is also manifest by what he said casually in Dhulia Jail. To quote him :

> " People delight nowadays in talking in terms of the *Ramayana*. British Raj is said to stand for Ravana, Mahatmaji for Rama, Vallabhbhai for Hanumana, Jawaharlal for Angada and so on. I say to myself : what role is there for me in this *Ramayana* ? Looking about, Ahalya turning into stone suggests herself. I shall be blest, thrice blest if I were to become that stone."

Never was humility more excelled. Never was ambition more ambition–less !

Towards the close of 1932 Vinoba wrote a letter to Gandhiji, giving the details of his village work and craving his guidance. Addressing him as *Krita–yugi Vinoba*, Gandhiji in the course of his reply observed :

> "If something must be said, it is enough to say that the fiery ordeal you are going through would build a bridge between heaven and earth. If there is anything to communicate, I shall write ."

Later, when he was to settle down at Nalwadi, Vinoba in a letter to the Master, wrote :

> "Wardha Ashram will complete the twelfth year of its existence soon. A Yoga has done its full cycle. Experiences have been good. Egotism has disappeared. The conviction, that God alone is, has grown. But for your behest I would not have lived here so long. With me nothing counts in this world except your blessings. I may say that it has been my constant endeavour during these twelve years to observe the vows. Yet I have found many failings in myself. God has blest me more than my devotion has deserved."

He concluded :

> "I know your blessings are ever there to cover me. Still I write this letter, seeking them. You take this insignificant worker of yours under your protection. Secure for him from God the fitness that would make of him a worthy sacrifice in your great cause. If you have any directions to give for the future, please give."

Hardly would have been a master ever paid obeisance to thus by his disciple. Laying bare his heart, Bapu, addressing him as *Chiranjiva Vinoba* (as a father addresses his son), wrote:

> "Your love and faith fill my eyes with tears of joy. I may or may not deserve them. But they are sure to do you infinite good. You will be an instrument of great service."*

What a rare master and a rare disciple!

About 1937, Vinoba shifted, as observed earlier, from Nalwadi to Paunar. It was during his stay at Paunar in 1940 that Vinoba came into limelight and his name appeared for the first time on the front page of newspapers all over the country as India's first Satyagrahi of the Great War II. He was so chosen† by Mahatma Gandhi as a devout symbol of opposition to all wars in general.

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* These extracts from Vinoba-Gandhi correspondence are reproduced from the booklet, *Vinoba & Gandhi*, by Sri Birendranath Guha.

† See Appendix A.

After Vinoba offered Satyagraha he was arrested and sentenced to simple imprisonment of three months. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was chosen as the second Satyagrahi. He was, however, arrested before offering Satyagraha and was convicted for four years rigorous imprisonment. The Individual Satyagraha movement thereafter gathered momentum. On completing his term Vinoba again offered Satyagraha and was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. So also a third time, when Vinoba secured one year's imprisonment.

In the historic August movement of 1942, Vinoba was detained without trial on August 9, 1942, and released on 9th July 1945. He passed a portion of this detention period at Vellore Central Jail in Madras Presidency. It was there that he learnt from fellow-prisoners of Andhra, Karnatic, Tamilnad and Kerala, the four great languages of the South. From Vellore he was transferred to Seoni Central Jail (M. P.). After fifteen months' stay there, he was released. On the train journey from Seoni to Wardha *via* Nagpur, he was infinitely grieved to find aged persons—both men and women—easing themselves in day light along the railway track. So on returning to Paunar he quietly rejoined his village work, and took up the programme of the scavenger of the village Surgaon. Daily he walked down three to four miles from Paunar to Surgaon and continued his work regularly in heat or cold, sun or rain. Nothing could interrupt him except the sudden death of Bapu when he felt called upon to undertake higher and more serious responsibilities.

From April 1948 onwards, he travelled round the country by train to have a first-hand idea of the situation in the country, particularly about the refugee problem. He has called this tour *Shanti Yatra* (Peace Pilgrimage). Besides, he took active interest in the resettlement of displaced Meoes and refugees near about Delhi. That too, however, did not soothe his deeper yearnings. He returned to Paunar. Again an illness came to his rescue and after severe hard thinking he resolved upon a new venture of physical labour and self-sufficiency at his Ashram in which he himself worked in the field for eight to ten hours a day. He called it *Kanchana*

*Mukti* ( literally, freedom from gold ) programme wherein he sought to get rid of the slavery of money in our life and to investigate the potentialities, social, economic, intellectual and moral, of productive physical labour intelligently performed. That experiment was carried on successfully by a band of selfless workers for three years until April 1953 when he called them away for the more pressing Bhoodan Yagna work in Bihar.

As has been said above, Vinoba translated *Gita* from the original in Sanskrit into Marathi in 1930-31 and gave it the name of *Gitai* ( Gita mother ), which has sold in several lakhs. His devotion to *Gita* is matchless and utterly beyond description. As he says, he always remains immersed in the ocean of *Gita* and while in contact with the world outside he floats on its warm bosom. *Gita* is verily his mother. Says he in his *Gitai* :

गीताई माउली माझी तिचा मी बाळ नेणता
पडतां रडतां घेई उचलूनि कडेवरी ।

( *Gita* is my mother and I am her innocent child. While I stumble or weep she lifts me up in her arms ).

Thus Vinoba's life is a living commentary on the great classic. His Marathi discourses on *Gita*, *Gita Pravachan*, given to fellow prisoners in the Dhulia Jail in 1932, form a wonderfully original and popular exposition of the *Gita* doctrine vis–a–vis our daily life. It has been translated and published in Hindi, Gujarati, Oriya, Sindhi, Kanarese, Telegu, Tamil and Malayalam. Urdu and Bengali translations are ready for publication. Perhaps no other book in modern India commands a greater sale than Vinoba's *Gita Pravachan*. Besides he has written, *Isthit–Pragya–Darshan*, dwelling on the well known 18 verses of the second chapter of *Gita*.

Another remarkable book of Vinoba is entitled मूल उद्योग : कातना, an original contribution to the field of education, written on the basis of spinning as the basic handicraft for education. * In fact, if Gandhiji is the preceptor of *Nai Talim* ( or Basic Education), Vinoba is its father. He was a

* See Gandhiji's remarks in this connection given in Appendix A.

member of the Zakir Husain Basic Education Committee formed at Mahatma Gandhi's instance in 1937. He has been guiding the progress of *Nai Talim* from one stage to another.

Though averse to publicity, Vinoba is an accomplished editor. Mention has already been made of his *Maharashtra Dharma*. In 1949 he started from Wardha a Hindi monthly, *Sarvodaya*, now recognised all over the country as an authorised exponent of the Sarvodaya ideology. Another monthly intimately connected with Vinoba is the Marathi *Sevak*, edited by his secretary, Sri Damodardas Mundada. *Sevak* is printed in Vinoba's Ashram at Paunar and appears in *Lok-Nagari* characters, comprising of Vinoba's own improvements in the *Dev-Nagari* script and making it more scientific, popular and up–to–date.

Vinoba is also a linguist of eminence. Marathi language is his mother–tongue, so almost also Gujarati and Hindi. He has acquired a workable knowledge of Urdu, Bengali, Oriya, and Punjabi. He knows all the four south Indian languages—Tamil, Telegu, Kanarese and Malayalam. English, of course, he knows very well and French was his second language at the college. His profound command over Sanskrit which he acquired after leaving the college, is next only to that over Marathi. The wisdom of our classics is almost at his fingers' ends. That he is always young like a student is clear by the fact that he learnt Arabic at the age of 46 and studied by himself the holy *Koran* which he has gone through no less than seven times and which he can recite remarkably well. The only purpose of his learning all these languages is to become familiar with the traits of and establish brotherly relations with millions of his countrymen so that he might render easily and effectively his service of love towards them by becoming one of their own.

Thus Vinoba's whole life is an utter surrender to God whom he sees in the smallest particle as also in the poorest and most down-trodden in the land. Sri Mahadev Desai wrote about him:

> " Vinoba has something which others have not. His first rank characteristic is to resolve his decision into

action the moment the former is once made. His second characteristic is continuous growth. Besides Bapu, I found this quality in Vinoba alone."

Like the steady and incessant current of gushing stream Vinoba is always vigorous, fresh and new. Right thought (सद् विचार) is his constant companion. The development of the two—the thought and man with it—goes together and one helps the other in ascending to higher and still higher altitudes. A born Satyagrahi as he is, Vinoba's Paunar experiment of *Kanchan-mukti* was a robust, thought silent, physical manifestation of the disciplined expression of his ever-growing personality eager to empty itself of all desires and non-desires, to impart Satyagrahi aroma to the new freedom-air of the country and to make Swarajya a living reality with the teeming millions. He proceeded to materialise his dream with the twin weapons of love and bodily labour. It was, as it were, during his self-sought quest of a medium for its complete fulfilment that the concept of Bhoodan Yagna flashed across his mind.

CHAPTER III

# MARCH TO SHIVARAMPALLI

After Gandhiji's passing away most of the constructive workers of India assembled at Sevagram in March 1948 to devise ways and means to implement his last will and testament as also to carry on the constructive programme. Among other things, they decided to start, at Vinoba's initiative, a *Sarvodaya Samaj* *—a *samaj* or brotherhood for the *udaya* or uplift and welfare of *sarv* or one and all—a sort of brotherhood of those believing in the practice of truth and non-violence in whatever they sought and aspired to attain. It is a type of loose organisation in which nothing hard and fast is binding on its members. A *Sarvodaya Samiti* was, however, brought into being to arrange the annual mela, conference or Sammelan of the *Sarvodaya Samaj*, maintain the register of *sevaks*, and keep contact with those in the country and abroad interested in the pursuit of the Sarvodaya ideal.

The first Sammelan of this Samaj was held in the second week of March 1949 at Rau (near Indore in central India) where Vinoba elucidated the principles of *Sarvodaya* and the aims of the *Sarvodaya Samaj*. There was, however, founded a new organisation, Sarv Seva Sangh, to carry on the activities of

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* The word *Sarvodaya* ( the welfare of all ) was first used by Gandhiji as the title of his Gujarati translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. It is one of those books that ' brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation ' in Gandhiji's life. *Sarvodaya* connotes the greatest good of all and not of the greatest number alone. While the latter is a formula of the utilitarian, the former is the creed of the absolutist. *Sarvodaya*, as Gandhiji put it, was' true democracy realised', in which "everybody would know how to earn an honest living by the sweat of one's brow and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour' and 'would be ready to lay down his life when occasion demands it, never want to take another's life." Thus this beautiful word of *Sarvodaya* represents in a nutshell the cream of the Indian way of life and culture, of our philosophy and heritage. It was, therefore, in the very fitness of things that the constructive workers accepted Vinoba's suggestion to found the *Sarvodaya Samaj*.

the *Sarvodaya Samaj* and the various constructive work institutions like the A. I. S. A., the A. I. V. I. A., the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, the Goseva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, etc., were expected to merge into it and act as a single whole. A year later was held the second session at Angul (Orissa) which Vinoba could not attend.

The third session was to be held at Shivarampalli, about four miles from Hyderabad (Deccan) on April 8, 9, 10 and 11, 1951. To prepare for this, the Sarv Seva Sangh met at Sevagram on 6th March, 1951. Vinoba was also happily present at this meeting. During the course of the deliberations he hinted that he had no mind to go to Hyderabad. Shri Shankarrao Deo, present secretary of the Sarvodaya Samaj, questioned Vinoba about the advisability of holding the session at all when he himself who had conceived the very idea of the *Sarvodaya Samaj* was not going to attend it. The convenor of the reception committee, having come specially for this meeting from Shivarampalli, also expressed the futility of taking all the trouble if real men of importance who carried weight with the people were to absent themselves from a function of their own. This led Vinoba to think seriously and soon after he gave his consent. In the evening prayer he announced that in the morning of the day after the next, *viz.*, on 8th March 1951, he would leave his *Paramdham Ashram* on foot for Shivarampalli.

Next morning, on the seventh, he walked down from the Sevagram Ashram to Bajajwadi to meet Acharya Kishorlalbhai Mashruwala. On the way he stayed for a few minutes at the *Mahila Ashram*, his old home. From Bajajwadi he came to Gopuri (Nalwadi) where he left some instructions in connection with his tour, and then to his *Paramdham Ashram* at Paunar, covering about nine miles in all.

The evening prayer at Paunar on the seventh attracted a good gathering. He spoke about his resolve to leave the place next morning for Hyderabad and appealed to all, specially the inmates of his own Ashram, to carry on their work undisturbed and with unflinching devotion.

In the early hours of the morning of the eighth, Vinoba left his Ashram after the prayer. Those who accompanied here were : Shrimati Mahadevitai, an old old devotee of his, Sri Damodardas Mundada, his secretary, Sri Dattoba Dastane and Sri Bhau Panse ( two of his old students and assistants ) and Shrimati Madalsa Agarwal ( Seth Jamnalal's daughter to whom Vinoba is both like a father and *Guru* ). Besides these five, there were two bullocks pulling a cart driven by a Harijan, Pandurang by name.

At about 7 a. m. on March 8, 1951, Vinoba reached the *Laxminarayan* temple in Wardha town. On behalf of the city, Shrimati Jankibai Bajaj gave the *Bal-yogi* Vinoba a hearty welcome and prayed to the Almighty for his safe and early return. In a slow, moving tone Vinoba requested his audience to regard, in the spirit af a *sadhak* or seeker, every hour as the last when one should bank no hope on the illusory future but concentrate on the task in hand with complete submission to the All-Powerful. After some breakfast, Vinoba and party left Wardha town and shortly disappeared into the mist arising from the dusty road carrying them on.

Vinoba walked about ten to twelve miles every day reaching the halt at about nine in the morning. He would then go round the village and listen to its tale of woe. In the evening at five, people of the locality assembled in his prayer-gathering. Prayer was followed by a brief speech in which Vinoba dealt with what he saw and felt. He exhorted the people to take to self-help through hard work and to love one another without which true *Swarajya* (self-rule) could never be obtained. One evening he invoked them to prepare for *Gram Raj* (village-rule). He defined it in these terms :

> "When you, both the male and female inhabitants of the village, will work together to produce articles of daily necessity yourselves, you would be able to establish your own rule. It is called *Gram Raj*. Your *Raj* would be *Gram Raj* when your village is self-reliant and stands on its own feet. We have got

*Swaraj* now. But *Gram Rai* is yet to be achieved. For that we have to work hard and struggle. It would be a great struggle indeed."

Proceeding he observed:

"The fight for *Swaraj* is over. But a tougher fight for *Gram Rai* is imminent in future. The fight we gave was non-violent. So also this new fight would be non-violent. This fight cannot be postponed. You, all brothers and sisters, would be the soldiers in it. Our weapons would be the spinning wheel and plough-share. For our battle we require neither bomb nor guns. We simply need implements fit for work".

It was for the first time that an individual of eminence and standing had launched upon a walking tour with some vision and purpose. The event recalled the *Dandi* march of Gandhiji or the marches usual to our rishis and saints of yore. This tour brought Vinoba into contact with the post-freedom realities of our countryside as nothing else had done. On the other hand, the village people felt as if a saviour had come to their rescue. They described to him their woeful plight and suffering and unfolded their hearts. Vinoba advised them to realise their responsibility, do their duty, abjure evil and refuse to be guided by motives of fear, hatred and greed. These words came as a healing balm to them. Many of them promised to abstain from drinking and gambling and took to a life of self-reliance.

After covering a distance of 315 miles and passing through the districts of Wardha and Yeotmal in Madhya Pradesh and those of Adilabad, Nizamabad, Medak and Hyderabad, in Hyderabad State, Vinoba reached Shivarampalli on 7th April 1951. In the Sarvodaya Conference everybody looked to him for guidance and hoped that he would give the constructive workers a programme and thus provide to the country a light which would help us all in finding our way in this darkness.

Vinoba gave five speeches at the Sammelan. Four of them were delivered in the evenings after prayer and one—the

very first—was his inaugurating speech on the opening day of the Sammelan.

In his first speech, Vinoba said that constructive work must take a new direction now. And it was this. The workers should take to agriculture, do hard work themselves and develop faith in bodily labour. Besides they must try to work and run their institutions without the use of money. He quoted the example of Sevagram Ashram whose inmates had resolved not to make any use of money from and after January 1, 1952. He called this programme practical and the best that he could think of on the basis of his experience. He did not deny that there could be better and more effective programme based on others' experiences. But so far as he was concerned at the moment he had no other solution. Agriculture apart, he placed four other items of work before his audience: (i) Peace Army (*Shanti Sena*)—for which workers should go to and contact the villagers and honestly advise them on their day to day problems in the Sarvodaya spirit; (ii) Yarn contribution for which attempts should be made that *Charkha* or *takli* may enter every home and the people may be able to offer one hank or *gundie* of self-spun yarn on the occasion of Gandhiji's death anniversary; (iii) *Bhangi*-abolition—for which workers should themselves take to scavenger's work, educate the people to keep their latrines clean and make a proper use of refuse for manures; and (iv) the Honest Life Movement (*Sudh Vyohar Andolan*) as put forth by Acharya Kishorlal G. Mashruwala-which should be given a practical shape in the regional local units.

Vinoba's post-prayer speeches may be regarded as amplification of his opening speech. In his first post-prayer address on 8th April, he gave an illuminating discourse on the real content of prayer. He said that our prayer had become more or less a formal affair like *sadachar* or good conduct. But the one essential difference between *sadachar* and prayer is that the latter has a power to kill self-conceit which the former has necessarily not. For the same reason, Vinoba added, the *Bhakti* path was regarded as superior to *Karm*, *Gyan* or *Sankhya* paths. He remarked that our prayer was not yet like that *Bhakti* which it ought to be. He closed by saying

that he asked only one thing of God—My heart should continue to rest in Thee.

On the second day which was given to deliberation on the food situation in the country, Vinoba placed his views on the subject. Going into the various aspects of the problem, he observed that he had three suggestions to offer: (1) The agricultural labourers must be given their wages in the form of grain, (ii) the land revenue should be realised in kind, (iii) Government should take up Khadi work itself as the mills of India were not able to supply more than 11 yards of cloth per head whereas the minimum requirement was 16 yards.

The discussion on the third day was mainly concentrated on the issue of economic equality. Vinoba's discourse on this topic in his post-prayer speech was extremely refreshing and revealing. He pointed out that after thousands of years of effort, man had developed the quality of kindness (*daya*) and, we of India were taught that our duty was *daya* and that our aim was *Brahma* or *Samatwa*, equality. But for some hundred years or so the idea of equality was much in the forefront. He warned that this equality should not be brought about at the cost of *daya*. In the present situation it was felt that 'real *daya* lay in perfect equality'. As regards *Brahma Nirvan* or absolute equality, it had remained an individual objective and had never been tried on a social or mass scale. Therefore, great caution and understanding (*vivek*) were required while approaching this objective. We should not develop one quality while belittling or ignoring others, otherwise thousands of years of humanity would again have to be wasted in developing the quality of *daya*. Further he stressed that equality could not be achieved in a day. He observed that even one like him who owned nothing in this world as his own, felt that he had to do a lot in the field of equality. Vinoba quoted his favourite example of the sun which was always burning itself at a very high temperature in order that we of the earth might all enjoy that of 98°. So also workers would have to rise up and sacrifice themselves at the great altar of equality before that was turned into a reality for the common man.

The heated subject of discussion on the last day was with regard to the extent to which the constructive workers could enter politics. Vinoba's views are very well-known on the subject and he reiterated them in his last speech at the Sammelan. He said, " Our prayer to the Lord should be that I should follow my advice myself and on none else should its burden be imposed. " He went on to say that we should be satisfied by educating the masses, leaving them free to act as they liked. This was the real way of acquiring strength and power to do something as against applying pressure or force. He also gave a formula covering the five items of work he had put forth on the first day. It was like one line of a shloka, running thus: अन्तःशुद्धि, बहिर्शुद्धि, श्रमः शान्ति समर्पणम्. (antah-shudhi, bahir–shudi, shrama, shanti, samrpanam–meaning thereby, carrying on the activities of the Honest Life Movement, village sanitation and *Bhangi* abolition, agriculture and reverence for bodily labour, peace-army and yarn-contribution). He entreated the workers to execute this five-phased programme in all earnestness and sincerity. As for himself he said that on his way back to Wardha he had an idea to go round the region where the communists had worked and to make a study of the situation. And what would happen during this sojourn or hereafter only God knew, he said. But some fire seemed to be brightly burning within him and his face revealed a resolve to meet, come what may, with prayer, hope and confidence. Those gathered at Shivarampalli could easily read it there. But none could think that only a week after he would be offering the most revolutionary and yet peaceful solution of India's most baffling problem, that of land.

In deep meditation

# PART II

# ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT

## CHAPTER IV

# LIGHT FROM TELANGANA

To a greater or smaller extent our country, like any other, suffers from the malady of simultaneous existence of plenty and poverty, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, etc. Inside the country, however, perhaps the most conspicuous victim of this havoc is the State of Hyderabad whose capital city with its dazzling wealth and luxurious display offers a gruesome contrast to the squalor and poverty of the inhabitations not more than five miles off from the city. Again, nowhere in Hyderabad has this gulf between the haves and the have-nots assumed so devastating a proportion as in Telangana. It is the name given to the area comprising the districts of Mahbubnagar, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Nalgonda and Warangal, in the south-east, east and north-east of the State, where Telegu is the mother-tongue. The centuries old feudal administration of the State has only served to widen this gulf. The general public of Telangana are perhaps poorer and far more afflicted than their brethren in any other part of the country. But no attempts seem to have been made for ages past to alleviate their misery or meet their genuine grievances. A few years ago, however, it attracted the attention of some youths inspired by communism. They mustered together and raised a terrible uproar in some parts of Telangana. They dealt with the land-owners very severely, even resorted to murder at times, and recklessly divested them of their lands.

After the British withdrawal from India the situation in Telangana took a graver turn. As both the State Government and the Republican Goverment at New Delhi were preoccupied in the 'Police Action,' the communists took hold of this sleeping-hour opportunity to propagate their mission and perpetuated such horrors as to make the haves flee away with their lives and even the official administration seemed to have come to a standstill. By the time the Government was ready to tackle the area the problem had already taken the form of what is inadvertently called a 'big menace'. But all governments have a strange sense of prestige and a stranger sense of recovering it when lost. So both the Central and State Governments, amassing all possible stuff in the form of man or material, sprang upon Telangana with a leonine violence and forced its people to give correct clues of the communists or hand them over to them ( the police ). Frightened by this monstrosity, the poor inhabitants, began to give, in some measure, the whereabouts of some whom they knew. This enraged the communists bitterly. And they came at night to inflict every pain and torture on those who, according to their true or false information, had submitted to the wishes of the Government. Thus ravaged by the police in the day and by the communists at night, hundreds and thousands of men and women and children in Telangana were made to groan under a terror unparalleled in the country. Naturally many innocent people who had nothing to do with either the police or the communists also came under fire. It is like the grinding down of the proverbial ant together with the grain between the two stones. And truth is that the innocent ones far outnumbered those who were really hands in glove with the police or the communists. Virtually, therefore, a reign of terror stalked the entire Telangana and the woe-betide millions knew no end of their plight which beggared all description.

Towards these people, it was on the auspicious day of *Ramnavami,* the 15th day of April, 1951, that Vinoba set his face when he started from Shivarampalli on a walking tour of Telangana. To quote his own words :

> "I wanted to tour the Telangana as a soldier of *Shanti Sena* in order to propagate the message of peace. For a long time, I could not put into practice this wish of mine for many reasons. But however, after obtaining the blessings of the Lord Rama, I have undertaken this tour."

What is the problem of Telangana ? As Vinoba observed in his post prayer speech in the village of Mirialguda, "Some people here possess thousands of acres of land while some cannot call even one acre as their own." The seriousness of the situation can be gauged by what he said at Balapalle :

> "The population of this village is 3,000 and its cultivable area is 3,000 acres. But only 90 families own the entire lands, while 600 families are landless. Nor is there any cottage industry in the village. The weavers of the village hardly get yarn sufficient to keep them engaged for eight or ten days in a month. Equitable distribution of lands should be co-ordinated with the development of cottage industries. Villagers should not grow cash crops. They should produce food crops and enough cotton to enable them to make their villages self-sufficient in the matter of clothing. The trouble in Telangana is due to indiscriminate growing of cash crops, like ground-nut and tobacco."

It is, therefore, manifest that the maldistribution of wealth and property has brought about all the trouble in Telangana. Nothing else has so much contributed to the so-called communist menace as this dreadful disparity. As Vinoba said at Suryapet, "The rich people are responsible for the creation of the communists. The rich in fact are the father of the communists". The problem needs tackling at the root. No amount of police and military forces could do the job. One day Vinoba made it clear in a speech, "In summer you will not find grass but as soon as the rainy season starts, grass begins to grow as there are seeds of grass in the earth. So also the police can curb the communist menace for a while, but it cannot root it out permanently. So we must root out this menace by adopting the right path." Or

again, "The police will not be very helpful in fighting the communist menace. The only way to root it out is to remove the unequal distribution of land in a peaceful way."

How Vinoba struck upon the peaceful way is a fascinating story which requires a true-poet to reproduce it. Here follows, however, its brief account. Leaving Shivarampalli in the small hours of the morning of the 15th, Vinoba reached Hyderabad after sunrise and encamped there. On 16th he was at Hayatnagar and on 17th at Batasingaram, both in Hyderabad district. Next day he came to and halted at Pochampalli, a townlet of about 700 houses and 3000 people, in the Nalgonda district, which like the neighbouring district of Warangal had the reputation of being an important centre of communist activities. At about 9 a.m. he went round the village to learn of the people's weal and woe. He began with the Harijan area. He entered a hut where a newly born who had opened its baby eyes only four days back lay on a mat and its mother was sitting on the bare floor. Lovingly, Vinoba took the baby in his arms. The mother was much moved and said: "The child is very fortunate." Vinoba smiled and affectionately looked into the child's eyes. Returning it back to the mother he observed, "He is a good one indeed!" As Vinoba moved out of the hut, the young mother touched his feet. Blessing her by putting his palm on her head, Vinoba came out and stood at the door. A crowd of village people had meanwhile gathered. Most of them were Harijans. They related to him their tale of sorrow and suffering. Vinoba gave a patient hearing and requested them to see him in the noon.

After going round the village, Vinoba returned to his camp, attended to his correspondence and had a short nap. By one o' clock a good number of Harijans had assembled at his place. Out of curiosity some non-Harijans had also come. When Vinoba asked the Harijans what they thought would serve their interests best they replied that in case they got land for cultivation they would be able to meet much of their problems themselves. Vinoba inquired, "How much land do you want?"

They were not prepared for an answer. They began to look at each other with inquisitive eyes. The older ones

whispered among themselves for a while. Then an elderly one told Vinoba that eighty acres would suffice. With eyes bent, Vinoba assured them that he would try to obtain the same and requested them to submit a written application. For a minute there was an utter calmness. Vinoba seemed engrossed in deep meditation. Shortly after, he raised his head and inquired whether there were some landholders also in the lot sitting before him. He was told that there were. As if busy in loud thinking, he remarked, "If land is not provided by the Government or if it takes time, cannot something be done by the village people themselves ?" He desired to know whether any landholder was willing to donate his land.

Again, a silence.

Next moment, a man got up and said, "I will give you land; I will make a gift of hundred acres from my land."

Everybody was taken aback by pleasant surprise. Vinoba looked at him penetratingly and asked him to repeat what he had said. In a firm tone, that man spoke, "I will give away hundred acres and if people do not believe me what I say I am prepared to make a written declaration here and now."

Vinoba thought that he must have a talk with the donor. So he dispersed the meeting and asked them all to come to the evening prayer. The meeting over, he called the donor aside and asked him whether what he said was really true. He reiterated his statement. Vinoba requested him also to attend the prayer.

The prayer atmosphere that day was charged with serene emotion. In his post-prayer address, Vinoba described what had transpired in the day. Showing them all the generous donor, Sri V. R. Reddy (who stood up at his request and gave a *Pranam*), Vinoba said that if that friend went back on his word he would be regarded as a liar in the eyes of the village people. But as Sri Reddy had reaffirmed it to him (Vinoba) both in private and public he was sure he would stand by it.

Vinoba passed a sleepless night. He went over the day's incident again and again. He spent the night in prayer. He felt convinced that there was God's hand behind all that and that He wanted to use him as His instrument in that work.

Early next morning, when Vinoba was about to set out on his trek, he sent for Sri V. R. Reddy and asked him again whether he abided by his words. Sri Reddy repeated his promise and produced a written declaration.

Thus on April 18, 1951, was offered the first Bhoodan. Reaching the next village, Vinoba spoke about Sri Reddy's gift and inquired of the people whether there was anybody prepared to donate his land like Sri Reddy. As Providence would have it, a donor came forward. He offered a land-gift. It confirmed Vinoba's conviction. From now on he became an emissary of Bhoodan. And the great movement was born. Carrying on his message of love and peace, he went round the districts of Nalgonda and Warangal and not a day passed when people did not donate him some land. He pointed out their duty as citizens of a free country and appealed to them to accomplish it. As he said at the village Tanikella (in Warangal district) :

> "In olden days, when disturbed conditions prevailed in the country, our ancestors used to perform *Yagnas*. I also wanted to perform a *Yagna*, so I have started experimenting this *Bhoodan*. I have asked many persons to donate lands. Every one should take part in this *Yagna* which is in the interest of the upliftment of the people. Just as we give our share to the *Yagnas*, so also we should donate lands to the landless poor. People often say that nobody gives anything in the *Kaliyug*. But when there is a person to ask people give and up till now I have been given 3,500 acres of land."

Steadily and smoothly, Vinoba went on in Telangana preaching his gospel, the divine thought of giving over one's possessions for the sake of those who have not. He created a stir in the air. As the news trickled down beyond the

bounds of Telangana, one did not easily believe it. For is it not land for which people, even brothers, dispute and fight and kill ? But in Nalgonda and Warangal it had become a reality. Vinoba had generated a healthy thought in people's mind. Both the rich and the poor, oppressed more by fear than anything else, began casting off their fear and breathed, as it were, the air of liberation. He asked them to be brave and self-reliant.

In the course of this tour Vinoba also met communists and their friends. He interviewed some of them in the jails of Hyderabad and Warangal.* As regards the communist influence in Telangana, its genesis has been given above in Vinoba's own words. He bears no malice or ill-will towards the believers in the communist doctrine. Speaking at Chandupatta, he said :

> " I have heard that a sort of awakening does exist in this village, as the communists have put in some work here. I consider the communists as my brothers. I have got some friends among the communists and it is not a crime to be a communist. To be a communist is to serve the poor. "

But Vinoba has no doubt that the ways of Indian communists are not suited to the country. In the course of the same speech he observed :

> " But, however, the communists have indulged in violence and murderous acts. This is absolutely wrong and, therefore, all their services go overboard. Sri D. Venkateshwara Rao, a prominent communist, who belongs to this village is a good man. If he could see me, I would have been able to convince him that he had adopted a wrong path. I have met some communists in the jails of Hyderabad and Nalgonda and I held talks with them. It is my earnest wish to convince the people by making them understand that the way of peace is the real way to serve the masses."

At another place he stated :

> "I want to make it clear to the communists that it is not necessary for them to murder the rich, for the era of democracy has ushered in. As a matter of fact the rich can be killed without a pistol ; for every adult has now acquired the right to vote. The future *Raj* will be of the common man . I request the communists to come out openly and work. If they do that I will give my co-operation. If the communists abandon their practice of violence, all good and moral people will co-operate with them. Mahatma Gandhi also used to say: 'I am a communist but I will not accept the suicidal path of violence'. "

Nay, Vinoba goes even further. In an appeal to the communists, he said at Wyara :

> " I request them to abandon violence and if they do so I will accompany them to every nook and corner of India in order to propagate communism. "

Vinoba's method is that of love. As he observed at Kodmur:

> " The change that you are perceiving in the entire environment is due to the blessings of God. If everyone believes in God it is definite that He will show the way. God is present in everyone's heart. If we appeal to Him, much work can be done. I will accept lands which are donated willingly. I have not come here with a sten-gun or with any power which is vested in any Government. The communists are doing their work and the Government is also doing its work in its own way. I am also doing some work here in my own way which is essentially based on love. "

Vinoba believes in the innate goodness of man and the conversion of his heart by persuasion. When he met the communists in the Warangal Jail they asked him whether he could solve the problem by reinstalling the rich in their villages. Vinoba replied :

"I believe that hearts do change. The act of donation will lead to a duel between the good and the evil inherent in man and improve their outlook. The fusion of Indian metaphysics and Western science will necessarily be sweet. Non-violence alone is the remedy of all evils."

But to work this method is a very hard task indeed. A solid work of this nature could be undertaken only by the *Sarvodaya Samaj*. To quote from his Gavicharla speech:

"The Congress cannot serve the people because the principle of service has become a joke for the Congress. The socialists are a better lot but they are after power. In these circumstances, the *Sarvodaya Samaj* alone can deliver the goods."

During his tour Vinoba did not confine himself to land distribution alone. He also made a plea for self-help and village industries. As he said in a speech at Nalgonda:

"There is a limit to the extent of the availability of land. Besides, the population is also growing day by day. We must, therefore, increase the number of wells by digging new ones. We must construct canals also. The digging of new wells and constructing of new canals will usher in a new era wherein a man will be satisfied with twenty acres of wet land, whereas now he is not content even with hundred acres of dry land."

He continued :

"Without cottage industries, mere possession of land by kisan will not solve his problem. If the kisans take to producing finished goods from the raw material obtaining in the villages, then only they can save themselves."

He also asked the rich to open *Nai Talim* schools in the villages so that no children need be sent to the cities.

Vinoba concluded his Telangana tour on June 6th, 1951, when he reached Mancherial, a little town on the bank of the Godavari. During this historic tour of 51 days, Vinoba encamped at 51 villages. He passed through some 200 villages and received 12,201 acres of land for distribution among the landless, for which purpose he formed a committee af three: Sri Kodandaram Reddy, Smt. Laxmibai Sangam and Sri U. Keshava Rao (convenor). During this pilgrimage of peace, Vinoba settled about 500 village disputes, almost ten every day, and addressed some two lakhs of people.

A word about his daily routine. Getting up early in the morning before four o'clock, Vinoba did some study and then attending to nature's calls and the morning prayer, he started on his tour by five. Walking for twelve miles until nine he would encamp at a village, the halt for the day, have his bath, frugal meal and rest. Then for two hours he went through newspapers and his correspondence. It was followed by spinning for one hour. Interviews began at four and the evening prayer at five, which closed with a speech by Vinoba. Again, he gave time to the visitors after the prayer and by nine o'clock he went to bed.

In fine, Vinoba's endeavour in Telangana was to "bring about," as he said in a mass meeting at Warangal, "a silent ideological revolution in our social outlook by asking the rich to donate lands to the poor. This Bhoodan Yagna (Land Gifts Mission) is an application of non-violence, an experiment in transformation of life itself. I am only an instrument in the hands of Him who is the Lord of all Ages, like even those who give and those who will receive the gifts. It is a phenomenon inspired by God."

On June 27, 1951, he returned to his Ashram at Paunar. Smt. Jankibai Bajaj offered him a hearty welcome in these few words: "It is perfectly true that Vinoba has done a miracle in Telangana. But the work which the *Paramdham Ashram* inmates, through their hard and unostentatious services like those of Bharat, have been doing here during his absence is no less significant." Prayerfully, Vinoba replied:

"No more talking please! The little work that has been done is the result of the goodwill of one and all. One should always invoke and appeal to that goodwill. Its result must necessarily be good and soothing. This faith has been further deepened by the work so far done. Therefore, let us all think good, meditate good and do good."

CHAPTER V

# ON TO DELHI

From times immemorial the world has known beggars. Stationed at a particular spot or wandering from place to place, most of them beg for a few crumbs to maintain their own otherwise unendurable existence, some of them (specially in our unfortunate country) hug it as a fashionable profession, others claim and collect larger sums to give physical shape to a cherished dream, still others, though beggars, radiate light and knowledge and are content with anything they get unasked. Hardly, however, is any instance found of a beggar begging for acres and acres of land and simultaneously preaching a gospel of love and service and self-help from door to door.

When during the summer of 1951, Vinoba toured the communist–ridden and Government–ravaged area of Telangana many educated folk, ridiculing his efforts, threw him a sort of challenge to testify to the truth of his convictions by making the haves of non-terrorised areas part with their land. Vinoba quiety listened to this unhappy criticism, but gave no reply. For he does not regard anybody as his adversary. Nor he knows paying him in the same coin. As he said in a speech at Paunar in September 1950, on the occasion of the third anniversary of his father's death, he had neither any ambition to do one thing nor not to do another. He let things take their natural course. A call came from within and he started walking to Hyderabad and thereafter in Telangana.

His agony at the fast deteriorating social and economic condition of the country was continuously increasing. The fever which had seized him in Telangana was hurting his soul constantly. And one day, when Sri R. K. Patil, his old friend and a member of the National Planning Commission, called on him on August 10, 1951, to gather his impressions on the Draft Report of the Five Year Plan, Vinoba could contain himself no longer and burst forth :

"In the Constitution you promise work and food to all citizens. But you have totally forgotten this assurance. If you, on whose shoulders lies the responsibility of providing work to all, find it impossible to do so, you must resign.

"You have suggested family-planning. Produce less children! But who are you to ask me to do so? Are you my servant or master? There is far less per acre strain on Indian soil than it is in Japan or Great Britain. Have you ever thought over why the populations increase? A lion breeds less while a goat does more......

"The real solution is not brith-control but directing the life as such on the right channels......

"You ask village industries to support themselves. You first cut off my feet and then want me to stand.. Village industries did not die of their own accord, they have deliberately been killed..Why don't you think that when Gandhiji could do so much in those adverse days we should be able to do much more?......

"You took a pledge of acquiring food self-sufficiency by 1951. When you find it unrealisable you start a Planning Commission which says that self-sufficiency is well-nigh impossible......Do you ever imagine what would befall your country if war comes?

"You propose an import of three million tons of food. Have we any ancestral property to get it outright?...... Yours is a plan involving perpetual begging...... It cannot inspire anybody to produce more."

He was almost in tears at the horrible disregard shown by the Government and the Commission towards Khadi and village industries, in spite of the crushing poverty of the people and at the resourcelessness and helplessness, if not apathy, of both the Government and big business to help the millions earn an honourable living. He spoke thus :

"I can clad all the country in Khadi within two years. If not, you can hang me on the scaffold. But it is a different matter altogether if you do not want Khadi at all."

Coming again to food self-sufficiency pledge, he said :

"On the day when you took that pledge you ought to have made a plan to execute it and order the country accordingly......But the Government is dollar-mad....While laying out any plan the Commission must have accepted the condition of attaining the self-sufficiency target. But it did not. Over and above, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has signed the report. The Commission has made the very person who took the pledge break it...."

Reiterating the point, he appealed :

"Make the country self-sufficient and give food to all. Had Jawaharlalji taken that pledge as an individual it would have mattered little. But he did it as a Prime Minister and hence it is a pledge by the nation. The only way left now is to carry out this pledge at any cost whatever."

During the night succeeding this talk, Vinoba had almost no sleep. He felt he had objected to a plan but had nothing constructive to offer as an example. So he called the representatives of the various constructive work institutions of Wardha and Sevagram and asked them to live up to their creed. He continued that though their institutions were named "All-India-such-and-such," it was not visible anywhere what they did to justify such a big name. So why not call them "All-World"? He urged upon them to concentrate on some villages around Wardha town and devote themselves to the task of building an order of society in keeping with their ideas. Happily, these Sanghs have begun working on the new lines.

Meanwhile the Planning Commission member conveyed Vinoba's impressions to his chief, the chairman of the Planning Commission and Prime Minister of India. Never before had

On the way to Delhi

this report been more severely and more sincerely criticized. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Vinoba that he wanted to see him in order to discuss the Plan. The invitation worked as an incentive. He decided and resolved to start for Delhi on foot on September 12, 1951.

Addressing a large gathering at Paunar in his post-prayer meeting on the previous evening (September 11) he said :

> "The work I have started is known as the Bhoodan Yagna. It is not simply Bhoodan. It is a Yagna in which all can co-operate and contribute.
>
> "If it is regarded that land could be obtained in Telangana because it was a communist-infected area, we must abandon all hope of a non-violent revolution in India....If we grasp the fundamental idea behind this Yagna, I hope the rich will honour the poor and donate lands to me. In case this hope is realised it will lend a mighty support to the non-violent revolution."

Then and there he was presented with 75 acres of land. What a remarkable birthday-gift ! Next morning he commenced his march to Delhi.

Vinoba covered about 12 to 16 miles every day. His party included a dozen companions, men, women and youngsters, as also a bullock-cart. His first halt was at Seldoh at the *Pannai Ashram* of Dr. J. C. Kumarappa, the well-known economist and renowned authority on village industries. The object of this Agrarian Research Centre is to conduct experiments towards establishing a true democracy or cent per cent village republic.

Reaching Nagpur on September 15, Vinoba put his life-mission in these few words :

> "Till God keeps strength in me I shall tour the country and beg for land for the landless."

At a meeting of constructive workers at Nagpur, he said that he wanted to create an atmosphere to bring about a change in the structure of the present society through a non-

violent revolution. Without such a revolution, they could not solve problems like poverty. He added that the work on which he had embarked was of great importance. He would appeal to all who had land to part with some of it. According to him, land like air and water is the common property of the people and there should be an equitable distribution of it. What he wanted was to generate the power of the people and make them develop their own strength and capacity to solve the problem without waiting for the Government to do it.

As regards the future, Vinoba was and is very hopeful. He gave vent to his optimism at Amarwara (M. P.) when he said :

> "The people are going to solve their own problem. I am not going to solve the problem. I am simply creating the atmosphere. The beginning is always small. When atmosphere spreads all over, somebody will ask and somebody will give. Where then is that need for my agency between the rich and the poor ? "

When asked whether the problem could be solved without the intervention of the Government, he replied :

> "In democracy it is the people's will that is Government. What the people desire the Government has to implement. "

He believes in educating the people so that they may grow self-conscious and self-respecting. Thereafter they could easily get the desired.

During the seven days from September 11 to September 17, Vinoba covered 111 miles and obtained 2,000 acres of land, an average of a little less than 300 acres per day. The daily average in Telangana being 200 acres, it shows that for its fulfilment Bhoodan Yagna movement does not require the background of loot and terror as was the case in Telangana. Vinoba demands land as a right of the people, rather he wants to restore it back to its real owner. He asks it from all, the rich as well as the poor. It is the latter who respond easily and quickly. In the course of ten days, from September 18 to 27, he received 2,316.49 acres from 201 donors of I4 villages as shown below :

TABLE I

| Date | Halt | Population | Villages between two halts | Land-gift (in acres) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sep.18 | Umarnala | 300 | | 50.80 |
| „ 19 | Chindwara | 35,000 | | 54.00 |
| | | | Sarna | 3.55 |
| | | | Bangaon | 11.50 |
| „ 20 | Sangori | 1,295 | | 79.55 |
| „ 21 | Amarwara | 2,955 | | 108.13 |
| | | | Kunawool | 1.00 |
| | | | Jungarwali | 9.00 |
| „ 22 | Sarlakapa | 320 | | 50.95 |
| „ 23 | Harrai | 1,669 | | 1,033.33 |
| „ 24 | Kandeli | 48 | | 5.00 |
| „ 25 | Narsinghpur | 13,000 | | 62.93 |
| „ 26 | Kareli | 7,000 | | 319.00 |
| „ 27 | Barman | 931 | | 527.75 |
| | | | Total | 2,316.49 |

The details of the said 201 donors are as under

TABLE II

| No. | Village | Gifts below 25 acres | Between 25 and 50 acres | Above 100 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Umarnala | 7 | .. | .. |
| 2 | Chindwara | 6 | .. | .. |
| 3 | Sarna | 4 | .. | .. |
| 4 | Bangaon | 8 | .. | .. |
| 5 | Sangori | 42 | .. | .. |
| 6 | Amarwara | 34 | .. | .. |
| 7 | Kunawool | 1 | .. | .. |
| 8 | Jungarwali | 6 | .. | .. |
| 9 | Sarlakapa | 18 | .. | .. |
| 10 | Harrai | 20 | .. | 1 |
| 11 | Kandeli | 3 | .. | .. |
| 12 | Narsinghpur | 11 | .. | .. |
| 13 | Kareli | 17 | .. | 1 |
| 14 | Barman | 19 | 1 | 2 |

It clearly shows that the response in towns or big cities was far less than in unsophisticated villages. In villages too, the comparatively poor people surpassed their richer brethren in the act of donation. With the progress of the movement, the donations of the poor succeeded in rowelling the sides of the rich with a moral spur who, as shall be seen hereafter, came forward later to offer their share in thousands and lakhs of acres. At one place Vinoba remarked :

> "Those who do not donate land today will do so tomorrow. They cannot help giving the same. In India there is none who would turn down my request for land."

On October 2, 1951, Vinoba reached Sagar, a University town in northern Madhya Pradesh. As it was the last important halt in that State, constructive workers from all over the State had gathered for a conference. Addressing them he said :

> "The mission I have undertaken is an act of devotion and service not only of the poor but also of the rich—of all the people. I have a strong conviction that this work is going to appeal to all."

He called upon the workers to become pure when not a word would they need to utter and a mere thought in the heart conceived at home would suffice. It was in this conference that he placed before the country his demand for five crore acres of land by 1957—his *five year plan*. He declared :

> "Though my own stomach is very small, that of the *Daridranarayana* is very big. So if any one asks me what my demand is, I say, 'Five Crore Acres of Land.' I mean thereby cultivable land. If there are five sons in the family, I want to be considered the sixth ; if four, the fifth. Thus I claim one-fifth or one-sixth of the total cultivable land in the country."

On bended knees he implored :

> "I appeal to all of you to contribute your mite for the worship of *Daridranarayana*. This is real *Yagna*—

sacrifice. I, therefore, beseech every one to come forward and put his shoulder to this task. This will usher in an unprecedented and mighty revolution in the country. I can, even as I stand here, behold it taking place before my eyes."

Referring to the present awful condition in the country he asked them not to feel depressed:

"All this corruption which we see arround us is due to the evils in the present day economy. The organisation of our economic life is bad. People are swept away by the tide of these outer evils and led to commit mistakes. Therefore if we can change the structure of the economic life, you may be sure that our people can well set a unique example in the world."

He added:

"I hold to the belief that the moment we succeed in creating society free from exploitation, the intellectual and spiritual talent of the people of India, which lies obscured at present, will shine forth. We, the believers in *Sarvodaya*, therefore, have vowed that we will change the present structure of society. I have absolute belief in this mission, otherwise I could not have approached you to give away your lands so openly and unreservedly."

Vinoba's last halt in Madhya Pradesh was on October 7, at Malthaun. The total land donated in a trip of 25 days amounted to 6700 acres from 563 donors of whom 541 donated below 25 acres each, 9 between 25 and 50 acres each and 13 above 100 acres each.

On October 8, Vinoba set his foot on the soil of Uttar Pradesh and encamped at Birdha in Jhansi district. Spending three days in U. P., he entered Vindhya Pradesh and reached Tikamgarh on October 11. The great Hindi writer, biographer and journalist, Sri Banarsidas Chaturvedi, together with his young comrades, remained with Vinoba during his five days' stay in Vindhya Pradesh. The innocent people of

this beautiful and mountainous State, littered with happy remembrances of our glorious past, were extremely glad to have Vinoba in their midst for even a few days. Bapu had never been to this area during his life-time. But they now had the satisfaction of having his *manas-putra* (spiritual son) amongst them.

Vinoba again came to U. P. on October 16 and halted at Chirgaon as the guest of the illustrious family of Sri Maithili Saran Gupta, the celebrated Hindi poet. Other prominent Hindi poets, novelists and writers, like Smt. Mahadevi Varma, Sri Ramadhari Singh Dinkar, Sri Ilachandra Joshi and Sri Brindavanlal Verma also graced the occasion by their presence. Vinoba utilised a good part of the day in finalising the Hindi version, as rendered by Sri Siyaram Saran Gupta, himself a poet of renown as also the younger brother of the elder poet, of the well-known eighteen verses of the second chapter of the *Gita* which formed part of Bapu's evening prayer. It is interesting to note that in Telangana, Vinoba was reciting the Telegu version of those verses in his prayer, which endeared him all the more to the people there. In Madhya Pradesh he carried on the Marathi version from his *Gitai*. He was anxious to have the Hindi version for northern India. And now Sri Siyaram Saran's Hindi renderings of *Isha-vas-Upanishad* and *Gita's* eighteen verses constitute a regular part of Vinoba's morning and evening prayers respectively.

On 17th October, Vinoba was at Jhansi, immortalised by the fame of Rani Lakshmibai. In the name of this brave woman-warrior who refused to bow down before the aggressor, he appealed to the residents of Jhansi to donate land and donate not only generously but also bravely. Addressing a students' gathering he remarked:

> "You can take part in political activities but not in political groupings. Also you must live like a lion, not turn into sheep. Only sheep form a flock or union. Lions do not. One thing more. Today everybody wants to impose his views on students. I want to warn you of these invasions."

Leaving Jhansi in the morning of the 18th, Vinoba again came to Vindhya Pradesh and spent a day at Datia. On 19th October, he entered Madhya Bharat at Dambra. His third halt in Madhya Bharat was at Gwalior. The audience in the public meeting there was unusually large. Vinoba told that huge gathering :

> "I have not come here to beg gifts. I have come here to impart you a lesson—the lesson of the casting away of ownership. It is wrong to assert that 'I own this, it is mine, etc.' When this feeling of ownership dies away, anybody who asks for or requires land would get it and *Ram Raiya* would then be established. This is what I call *Sarvodaya*. I invite you to come with me. Do this revolutionary work. I want to bring about a revolution in thought and resources."

At Gwalior he also addressed a meeting of Jagirdars in which he appealed to them to ponder over the absurdity of individual ownership of land which has been called as mother by the *Vedas*. He was, he said, their friend no doubt, but also that of the poor. The Jagirdars, moved at the truth of his words, assured him :

> "We are convinced you are also our friend. We are Rajputs. As Rajputs, it is our *dharma* to donate land. Though the Government has not left much with us, yet we assure you we shall all think over the matter and shall do all that we can in your Bhoodan Yagna."

After spending two more days in Madhya Bharat, Vinoba encamped at Dholpur in Rajasthan on the 24th. Next day, he entered Uttar Pradesh for the third time, this time from the west at Jajau in Agra district. He was in the legendary *Brij–Bhumi* now. On 27th October, he stayed in the historic city of Agra and next day he entered Mathura district of epic glory. Spending about a week there, Vinoba entered Aligarh district on November 3. In Aligarh town, he also addressed the students of the Aligarh Muslim University, whose

Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Zakir Husain, former president of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, is Vinoba's old friend. Passing through the districts of Bulandshahar and Meerut, Vinoba marched on to Delhi.

During this sojourn of 62 days from September 12, to November 12, 1951, Vinoba obtained 19,436 acres of land as detailed below :

TABLE III

| No. | State | Land in acres |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Madhya Pradesh | 6,700 |
| 2. | Vindhya Pradesh | 1,000 |
| 3. | Madhya Bharat | 500 |
| 4. | Rajasthan | 400 |
| 5. | Uttar Pradesh | 10,836 |
| | Total | 19,436 |

By this time another 3,000 acres had been collected in Telangana. Thus when Vinoba entered the capital of India he had secured more than 35,000 acres of land. On the eve of his arrival he sent the following message to the residents of that great city :

"I am on my way to Delhi propagating the ideal of Bhoomidan Yagna. Delhi is the capital of our country. Important people from all over the country live there. Apart from all this it has become a sacred place for us as the *Samadhi* of the Father of the Nation is located there. We are camping at a place near the *Samadhi*.

"I appeal to the people of Delhi, those who are its permanent inhabitants as well as others, to donate land liberally for the landless. They should regard them as members of their family with a legitimate

claim over the land. It is not necessary that the land should be located in Delhi State, it may be anywhere in India. Those who have money but no land can buy it and then donate.

" People should remember that I am not asking for alms but want it as a matter of right and am initiating them into the tenets of a new ideal. "

CHAPTER VI

# IN DELHI

Crossing on foot the hills and dales of central India, Vinoba entered the city of Delhi on 13th November, 1951, after covering a distance of 792 miles from his Paunar Ashram. Having left for Delhi on September 12 when he stepped into a fresh year of his life–journey, Vinoba reached the same after two full months when Pandit Nehru, India's Satyagrahi No. II of World War II and now her popular Prime Minister, was to step into a fresh one of his own the next day. The two Satyagrahis met on the bank of the Jamuna where a little more than three years ago were consecrated to the flames the mortal remains of the great Master who chose them both. One of them, Vinoba Bhave, representing the eternal conscientious spirit of man, symbolised India's time old faith in methods of love and service and sacrifice, while the other, Jawaharlal Nehru, representing Indian nationalism, symbolized India's determined resistance to support a war effort in which she was mercilessly dragged in by her despotic rulers without even consulting her or declaring their war–aims. Vinoba stayed for eleven days in the capital where he had nestled himself in a little thatched hut at Rajghat.

Physically, these 11 days may have offered well–deserved respite to his *entourage* after 62 days of continuous 'quick march.' But really, the period was one of very anxious thought and deliberation. Vinoba attracted all sorts of people, rich and poor, high and low, dignitaries and mere–nothings, leaders and led, who came to him for consultation or advice. The fact of the President of India or the Prime Minister calling upon him at his hut reminded one of the good old days when the biggest or mightiest of the big or mighty used to call upon and run to a naked fakir. The touching sight at Rajghat left a fair foreign correspondent

aghast and led her remark that, that could happen only in India. Surely, this can happen only in India which is destined to demonstrate and uphold the strength of soul-force as against that of all others combined.

Stationed as Vinoba was, near Gandhiji's *Samadhi*, it proved for him a perennial source of inspiration. As he said on the very first day :

> "I still feel that though his mortal remains are no more, his spirit is with me and whenever I am about to err he tells me the right way.,"

Vinoba introduced himself to Delhi's populace as the proverbial *Vaman* who covered the earth in three steps. So also his three steps are :

> "What I want the people to do is, first, to part with some of their land. Secondly, they should engage themselves in the service of others. Finally, in their service they should give up all and voluntarily sacrifice everything. This is the path into which I want to initiate the people."

And why was he asking for land ? His reply is :

> "We must make sacrifices for the poor. I am asking for land. It is just a symbol of that spirit of sacrifice. In every heart there should be a desire to serve *Daridranarayan*."

He did not accept cash. One day a trader came and offered him a sum of one thousand rupees. Vinoba spurned the offer and told him that he did not want money. He referred to the matter in his post-prayer speech in the course of which he feelingly remarked:

> "In my trek through the different parts of the country I have been offered well over 35,000 acres of land. At the traders' meeting I showed them my hands and pointed out that they were still not sullied. They are as clean as when I began my

trek months ago. I want to work without coming in contact with money. I do not want to waste my effort in dealing with the problems created by money."

He went on :

"Why do I not want money ? It is because money has brought the country to its present state. It is at the root of the country's degradation. People should work rather than ask others for money. Money should be eliminated from the daily routine. Money tells lies and is like a loafing tramp. And yet it has been made the basis of trade and commerce."

How mischievous is the nature of money was also set forth :

"For the peasant the produce is very nearly the same year after year, but prices go up and down. These prices are not of the produce but of money. It is the value of money which fluctuates. If money is so unstable, so uncertain, so unreliable, why should it be made the basis of all transactions ? I tried to get an answer, but found none. I have questioned economists to be able to discover the secret, but it had always evaded them."

Not that Vinoba does not know the vast hold of money. But he is determined to overthrow it. As he said at Delhi one evening:

"I realize that money, like God, is present everywhere, and it is not easy to eliminate it from life. But that is my aim. I never care to undertake an easy task. I become enthusiastic only when the task is difficult. I have taken up the land question knowing it to be full of difficulties. Similarly, I have undertaken to free the worker and the peasant from the shackles of money fully aware of the difficulties involved. Freeing people from the dependence of money means saving them from all kinds of bad and

evil influences. I have, therefore, been asking people to renounce their dependence on money by producing things they need."

Next day, Vinoba put forward his picture of currency:

"Some people imagine that I want to go back to the old barter system. That is not my plan at all. I am not against currency. Actually, I prefer paper currency to coinage. But the currency that I want is of labour. It should not be printed at Nasik at the behest of some ruler. It should be a currency adopted by the villagers themselves for their use. In this currency there would be no question of any credit."

This brought him to the question of decentralisation, unemployment, ruination of villages and village industries, and of Khadi. He observed:

"My plan envisages decentralisation which is a necessity. Even when God created the universe, He had to have a decentralized system. If He had not thought of decentralisation, He would have to deposit all intelligence in some bank at Delhi and then would have required motor-cars and planes to go about distributing it. Naturally He would have been tired out by all this and would not have had the time to lie comfortably in mid-ocean as He does." (A familiar picture of Lord Vishnu in ancient Indian mythology.)

Pointing out that village industries were ruined in the name of villages themselves and thus gave rise to the problem of unemployment, he remarked:

"Villages can produce cloth wherever cotton is grown. But when Khadi is mentioned all economists hesitate. I cannot say that they are in the hands of the capitalists, but the idea of not letting villages produce Khadi is a capitalist idea. In this both, capitalists and communists agree. The two have the

same ideas about production. They differ over the distribution of what is produced. In the case of Khadi, consciously or unconsciously, capitalist idea is being supported."

After reaching Delhi, Vinoba met for three successive days the members of the Planning Commission as also its chairman, the Prime Minister. In the words of Vinoba:

"During these three days of discussion I have placed my ideas before them. They have promised to consider my suggestions. I had several grounds for my criticism, but I would not go into them all. I would mention only one point.

"The main question is attainment of self-sufficiency in food. I was sure that the promise would be kept. Meanwhile the Food Minister made some statements on food. He repeated the pledge, but added so many conditions and exceptions that hardly anything was left of it. The conditions and exceptions made the matter serious. I, therefore, commented on the subject. A reply was given. But I was not satisfied. I wrote again. I had by now begun to wonder whether experts had abandoned the principle that food imports should be stopped. I wondered whether commercial considerations had been brought in to decide that it was not necessary to have complete self-sufficiency in food even though the country was mainly agricultural.

"I suggested that such a course would weaken the national will. That was the trend of my criticism and I have tried to explain my views to the Planning Commission members."

Yes, 'commercial considerations' had been brought in and a fascination for dollars has marked almost every activity of the Government. What, however, the masses had got to do with these American dollars or British sterling nobody could

precisely say. But all was not yet lost and things could be set right :

> " Whatever had happened could be forgotton. They can resolve again not to import food.... If a firm and definite resolve is made and an atmosphere is created in which no financial or other arguments can be offered against it, the goal can be achieved. But there should be no if's and but's attached to the decision. If a promissory note said that it fetched up to one hundred rupees it would be useless. Similarly about this resolve there should be no reservations and no exceptions or conditions should be mentioned. If such a resolve is made firmly and determinedly this time, the Planning Commission's time and the country's time spent in discussing the problem would be well-spent. "

The other vital point of difference between Vinoba and the Plannning Commission was with regard to the provision of work for all. To quote him :

> "There were two major differences. The first was I wanted no food imports, while according to the Planning Commission's Report there are to be imports for an indefinite period. Secondly, I wanted a policy of full employment for all. The Planning Commission have agreed it is their duty, but they say they cannot, under present circumstances, undertake it. In my opinion there can be no national planning without it. It is only when they accept this responsibility, they can develop the villages and make them self-sufficient. "

Vinoba also stressed the need of sinking wells to make use of subterranean water. While the Government river valley projects aimed at utilisation of river-water, Vinoba wanted to make use of underground water by digging thousands of wells in all parts of the country. The Commission did not take any serious notice of this too. Thus Vinoba and the Planning Commission parted practically as much apart as when they

had met. The basic wedge of difference between the two remains as ever. The fact is :

> "There is a difference between their approach and mine, though they have also the interest of the country at heart."

This, in brief, is what transpired in and about that little thatched hut at Rajghat during those few days. Vinoba had gone to Delhi to propagate his mission and create a proper atmosphere for it. As he observed. :

> "I have formed no organisation to propagate my views. People who accept my ideas themselves become preachers. Those who gave provided an example to others. The main thing is that one should do one's own duty. Fire merely burns, it does not worry whether anyone puts a pot on it, fills it with water and puts rice into it to make a meal. Fire burns and does its duty. It is for others to do theirs."

As becomes a true Satyagrahi, Vinoba is but doing his duty. With unflagging perseverance and growing faith, he goes on and on, on his mission. In his own words :

> "My work is a purifying work. Whether it influenced others or not, I am becoming purer of heart through this work and am nearing self-realization."

But humble as he is, he makes no claim to solve the land problem in toto or for all time. As he said at Delhi :

> "I am not trying to solve the big land problem. I do want, it were solved peacefully, but nobody could settle all the world's affairs. Ram had been there and Krishna had been there. They had done what they could do for the world, but there is no end to the problems. One can only do one's work."

Thus doing his work for eleven days in the capital, Vinoba left it in the early hours of the morning of November 24, 1951. He launched upon a walking tour of Uttar Pradesh.

## CHAPTER VII

# MOVEMENT GATHERS MOMENTUM

The response given by the people to the call of the Bhoodan Yagna movement during Vinoba's march to Delhi showed that they were no less enthusiastic than those in Telangana. 'It proved,' as Vinoba once remarked, 'that the conditions in Telangana were in no way special and the reason for the success was rather to be found in the fact that time-spirit itself was in its favour.' On leaving Delhi, Vinoba turned eastwards and proposed to go round the whole of Uttar Pradesh. According to his demand of one-fifth or one-sixth of the entire cultivable land in the country, he wanted one crore acres of land from this State. As a first instalment, however, the constructive workers of U. P., meeting at Mathura on November 1 and during Vinoba's presence (when he was on his way to Delhi), resolved to collect five lakhs of acres within one year. This decision marks a turning point in the history of the Bhoodan Yagna movement for it was the first occasion when workers of any part of the country decided to work for this movement with a definite target before them.

Addressing the workers assembled at Mathura, Vinoba observed :

> " The way in which we won our freedom through non-violence is unparalleled and unique in the history of freedom struggles of the world. All these achievements are symbolical of that austerity which is characteristic of our country's traditions. In the atmosphere of India, austerity is possible to be manifested in ever new forms. With this faith I have fixed the target of five crores of acres for land-gifts.
>
> " But this is not a mission which I alone can carry out. Of course, I speak subject to God's will .. If

we want to achieve it sooner within a specified time, we will have to bring into service a hundred-fold more devotion, energy and effort. It is a critical period in the history of our national movement. If non-violence fails to solve this, the greatest of our problems, we may be sure that the whole fabric of Gandhiji's constructive work is in danger of being destroyed. On the other hand, if it succeeds in this sector, it will make for all success."

He admonished them :

"It is my considered view that at this juncture the entire community of Sarvodaya workers should and must devote itself to this work of the land-gifts mission .... I ask you all to give yourselves, heart and soul, to the mission we have undertaken and make it successful."

Concluding, he appealed to them :

"It is the most momentous work to be done at the moment and not of one of the many types but one which must be done in suppression of everything else."

Leaving Delhi, Vinoba again entered Meerut district. On 29th November, he was in Meerut city, the headquarters of the *Gandhi Ashram*, the well-known Khadi-producing institution founded by Acharya J. B. Kripalani in 1922. The main burden of Bhoodan Yagna work in U. P. has been, since Vinoba's entry into Jhansi district, shouldered by Baba Raghavadas and Sri Karan Bhai. The former, a resident of Maharashtra, is a prominent Congress leader famous in U. P.'s eastern districts, and the latter, a native of Monghyr district of Bihar, is a youthful enthusiast who has been an energetic member of the *Gandhi Ashram* for several years. In the public meeting at Meerut, Vinoba observed that the Bhoodan Yagna movement contained the seeds to change the social structure and usher in a peaceful revolution. He said that the world looked to India to know how she discovered

non-violent solutions of her problems and appealed to them to donate land with a large heart.

Vinoba's last halt in Meerut district was at Sardhana. On the morning of 30th November, he left Sardhana to encamp at Khatauli in Muzaffarnagar district. But on the way he met with an accident when in the morning mist a novice cyclist collided against him. Vinoba fell down but got up and continued walking. On reaching Khatauli it was found that he was seriously injured. But he made no change in his routine. A few days later the pain became more acute. Yet Vinoba adhered to his programme. On 2nd December, Vinoba was at Deoband, a town in Saharanpur district and India's leading centre of Islamic learning and oriental culture. The *ulemas* of Deoband were simply struck at Vinoba's command of Arabic and his grasp over *Koran*. The whole colony of reverential scholars, grey in learning as in beard and years, offered him a special reception in the evening and felt singularly at home with him.

On 8th December, Vinoba encamped at *Ashoka Ashram* at Kalsi in Dehradun district. Sri Dharm Deo Shastri, the founder of that Ashram has been devotedly working, together with his wife, for years past for the uplift of the aborigines in that hilly area. When Vinoba reached the spot at ten o'clock in the morning he spoke a few words to the villagers gathered to welcome him. He began :

> " Your Kalsi is renouned for the last 2,000 years or more. In this famous place I am also going round like the *Puranic* horse of *Ashwa-medh-Yagna*. I have become the horse of Bhoodan Yagna. "

The *Yagnas* performed by Rajas or rulers in our country in ancient times were called *Raj-sooya-Yagna*. Vinoba calls Bhoodan Yagna as *Praja-sooya-Yagna* ( People's Yagna ). Besides land, he also began demanding donations of wells, bullocks, *rahets* (persian wheels), ploughs etc.—all essentials in agriculture, which are termed as *Koop-dan*, *Be'l-Dan*, *Hal-dan* etc. In fact, it was first in Telangana that Vinoba remarked that if one well was donated in every marriage in

our country, our problem of irrigation would be easily solved and we would be having about 18 crores of wells within 40 years.

During the three months of December 1951 and January-February 1952, were held the first elections in free India. Election fever caught all political parties in the country. When this fever was at its highest pitch, Vinoba was covering the Rohilkhand division in north-west U. P. He was advised by some political workers to suspend his work for sometime and carry it on again when the election heat had subsided. Vinoba replied that if sun continued to follow its course across the heavens or Ganga its own along the plains there was no reason why he should break his. He added:

> "I am but an instrument of His. He will take work from me as long as He chooses. Mine is not to interfere with His will. If He likes, He can suspend not only my programme but also me."

Inspite of the elections, Vinoba's prayer meetings were well attended and he used to receive gifts of land as usual. Everywhere he requested the people, specially the contending parties in election, to 'play' election-game rather than 'fight' it. He pointed out the havoc party-politics was causing and was likely to cause in India and pleaded for a strict adherence to the *Panchayat* principle in which the unanimous voice of the *Panchas* was regarded as the voice of Providence. After the elections were over he said during his post-prayer discourse one evening :

> "Now that the elections are over we must all unitedly work to serve the poor. Let us demonstrate that despite our different views in politics we can work together in Bhoodan Yagna. Through it we can show that we have the capacity to unite to work for the poor, that the people may elect whom they like but we workers cannot denounce each other. I have been explaining it from place to place. This unity can be maintained through Bhoodan Yagna work. This programme can succeed if all co-operate. This is also in the interest of all groups or parties."

On February 14, most of the Bhoodan workers of U. P. assembled together at Puwayan in Shahjahanpur district. It was the second provincial meeting after Mathura. In between, however, some workers of western U. P. had also met Vinoba at Rampur. At Puwayan, Vinoba asked the workers to fulfill without delay the respective quota of their districts so that the initial target of five lakhs of acres might be realised before the next Sarvodaya Sammelan.

Covering 18 districts of U. P.—Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Dehradun, Bijnore, Moradabad, Rampur, Nainital, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Budaun, Etah, Mainpuri, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi and Lakhimpur-Kheri, Vinoba reached Sitapur on 22nd February 1952. During his march of 90 days, Vinoba obtaind 28,308 acres of land from 1,747 donors. Thus the daily average came to 311 acres, while the corresponding figures in the trip to Delhi and in Telangana were about 300 and 200 respectively. On account of limitations of space it is not possible to go into the scores of touching scenes met with during Vinoba's tour, which present to one's gaze the true picture of village India and have been a source of constant inspiration to the eye-witness as also to others. Mention may, however, be made of three of them.

At the village of Chaudahpur in Moradabad district, a blind man, Ram Charan by name, accompanied by a friend, reached Vinoba's camp after midnight at 1 a. m. All were asleep. Perchance one worker in the camp got up and inquired of the blind man what brought him there. He said, "I am told that here is a Baba who accepts land-gifts for the poor. I have got but twelve bighas of land which I want to donate to him." The gift-deed (*Dan Patra*) was filled in by the worker and Ram Charan's finger-print taken on it. Thereafter, the great donor walked back to his village six miles off. Vinoba came to know of it next morning. Referring to this incident in his evening address he remarked:

> "They say that Ram Charan was blind. But in fact it is we who are blind. We should know that in

Ram Charan's form, the feet ( *Charan* ) of God (*Ram*) himself had come to bless the Bhoodan Yagna."

Vinoba was camping at Kaladoongi, a small village in Nainital district. An old woman in a neighbouring village somehow came to know that a Baba was collecting land for the poor. She owned some land in the hilly region and some in the Terai area. Walking down from her village she reached the camp at 11 p. m. when everybody had gone to retire. At three o'clock in the morning, Vinoba's secretary, Sri Damodardas Mundada, rang the morning bell and came out for the nature's call. He found the old woman sitting on the door step. She wanted to donate her Terai land as as also one house. After her gift-deed was executed she happily returned to her home.

At a village in Gorakhpur district, Vinoba was given a very warm welcome. Women folk sang devotional songs and took *arti.* Accosting him, an old woman came forward, bowed down before Vinoba and felt very shy. He asked her, "Do you want to say something ?" Gathering courage, she said, "Yes, I have 12 bighas of land and five sons. You are the sixth. Hence would you please accept two bighas?" With utter humility, Vinoba acceded to her request. And in the evening prayer he observed:

> "These two bighas amount to two lakhs in my eyes. These are the blessings of that mother to my work."

From Sitapur, Vinoba entered Bahraich district wherein he also passed a day at Ikauna near the famous Buddhist place of pilgrimage, Shravasti. Then he covered eastern districts of U. P., *viz.*, Gonda, Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Azamgarh, Ballia and Ghazipur. This part of U. P. is very densely populated and the people here are very poor and miserable. In the districts of Azamgarh and Ballia, Vinoba's prayer meetings were also attended, amongst others, by communists whose red flag was frequently conspicuous. At Ballia, communists also presented a welcome address to Vinoba. The goodwill as also the enthusiasm of the people in these eastern

districts were tremendous. But what was rarely seen was the constructive worker who could convey Vinoba's message to that receptive mass. This led Vinoba to remark one day :

> " I have understood why communists thrive in this area. Simply because there are no constructive workers here. Communists want to serve the poor. Should workers take to real service why would communists be here at all ? "

Vinoba placed his ideology of *Samya Yoga* in his meetings in this area and asked the people to grow fearless and hard-working. In the trek from Bahraich to Ballia, Vinoba was donated 17,476 acres of land by 1,784 donors in seven districts while the number of donors in the 19 districts between Meerut and Sitapur was only 1,747. The daily average in these districts exceeded 400, which shows that the Bhoodan message was spreading far and wide and the movement was gaining momentum.

At Muhammadabad in Ghazipur district, Vinoba's spinning-hour programme was also joined by some local people, prominent among whom were two women who span on the *charkha* with their eye bandaged. Vinoba appreciated it very much and in the course of his post-prayer address observed :

> "Very useful is the practice to spin with eyes covered because we must generate the capacity to spin not only during the day but also at night. Spinning is such a thing as can be practised in the absence of solar or lunar light and with Ramnam on the lips. Arjun also practised *Dhanurveda* likewise in darkness. A lot of experiments in spinning have yet to be conducted. This is an important one amongst them. I have seen the blind spinning. But spinning with covered eyes brings immense peace and particularly so when it is carried on in the austerity of silence."

He then went on to add :

> "Our present poverty cannot be wiped out so long as we, the people of countryside, do not take to

produce our own cloth ourselves by self-spinning and weaving."

On entering the ancient city of Kashi (or Benares), Vinoba was accorded a very touching reception by the charming boys and girls of the Annie Besant School. Vinoba encamped at Kashi Vidyapith. While on his way to the Vidyapith, he passed through *Seva Ashram*, the home of the renowned sage and seer, Dr. Bhagwan Das. The great friend, philosopher and guide received him at his home where Vinoba spent some time. On 12th April 1952, Vinoba reached the village-colony of Sevapuri, some 14 miles from Benares town and near the Uparwar station* on the Mogul Sarai-Lucknow route of the Northern Railway. Sevapuri is the name given to this colony, a branch of the *Gandhi Ashram* of Meerut, founded in 1946 by Shri Dhirendra Mazumdar, the veteran founder-member of the *Gandhi Ashram* and a former president of the All-India Spinners' Association. It is the most prominent centre of constructive work in U. P., now managed by Sri Karan Bhai. At present Sevapuri is also the headquarters of the U. P. Provincial Bhoodan Yagna Committee.

At Sevapuri on April 13, 14, 15 and 16 was held the fourth annual Sammelan (or session) of *Sarvodaya Samaj*, presided over by Sri Srikrishnadas Jaju whose life is a dedication to the cause of Khadi. Total land collected in the country by that time amounted to 1,02,361 acres obtained from 4,936 donors. donors. It was inaugurated by Acharya J. B. Kripalani. In his opening speech he remarked that time had come when the constructive workers should deeply ponder over the implications of constructive work, whether they wanted to carry it on as a means of self-realization or as an old tradition which they had to maintain for want of any other work or as an instrument to build up a new society free from exploitation and capitalism and communism. He closed with the words :

"If you stress on the formation of a new society you will have to think seriously over your approach

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* Now named as 'Sewapuri.'

and attitude to political matters. You cannot avoid politics."

Sri Shankarrao Deo, secretary of *Sarvodaya Samaj* and Sarv Seva Sangh, placed a resolution * before the Sammelan calling upon for a collection of 25 lakhs of acres of land in Bhoodan Yagna within two years as a first instalment to fulfill Vinoba's demand of five crores, in order to establish a classless and exploitation-free society on the basis of truth and non-violence. Sri Deo said that the time had now come when believers in the Gandhian ideology should raise aloft the banner of economic revolution of which Bhoodan Yagna was a symbol. Sri Purshotamdas Tandon, former president of the Indian National Congress, made a fervent plea for providing land to the landless and placed his scheme of garden-housing in which every family had at least one acre of land for housing and cultivation purposes combined.

In this Sammelan, Vinoba observed that after Gandhiji's departure he was continually thinking how we could come in close contact with the people and make use of *ahimsa* (non-violence) for solving their problems.

He continued :

> "And I was led to three items of work. First was the hank-offering at the *melas* held in the memory of Gandhiji. It struck me we should fix it at one hank per person, neither more nor less. If this rule is followed, every hank would be a vote in favour of *Sarvodaya*."

The second thing was that Gandhiji's institutions had now passed that stage when they carried on their activities with the help of money. They should strive to free themselves as much as possible from the dependence on money. To quote Vinoba's words :

> "Then alone will our work breathe new life and our villages be resuscitated. That will create its

* See Appendix B.

effect on Government.... I wish all our constructive institutions to apply themselves to this experiment of becoming free from dependence on money and concentrate their energies on the construction of ideal villages."

In this connection, Vinoba endorsed Sri Dhirendra Mazumdar's proposal for the boycott of certain machine-made products. Vinoba said that the proposal was full of potentialities and that they would be able to achieve some advance only if they put it into practice. It was necessary for the success of the programme that the workers should themselves set an example of their precept and reject the machine-made products from their personal lives. This was possible through his programme of elimination of money economy, *Kanchan mukti, i. e.*, freedom from money.

The third item was Bhoodan Yagna which Vinoba characterised as 'a work of basic importance.' It would succeed only if the workers had faith in it. Vinoba remarked :

"Faith is like a firm wall. It is not like a curtain suspended with strings. Faith either stands firm or lies flat. It is either complete or not at all. Just as a person is either wholly alive or quite dead, and cannot be 40, 50, or 60 per cent alive, and 60, 50, or 40 per cent dead, so too faith cannot be halfway. No important work is ever accomplished without faith. Act (*Kriti*) follows faith (*Shraddha*) and conviction (*Nishtha*) follows act. Before conviction grows in a man, he works with faith. Conviction is faith affirmed by experience. Faith precedes conviction and has to be there before a man commences any work. Hence I say that since we want to solve this problem by the moral force of man, we should have unflinching faith in our method."

He went on :

"Let me assert as a truth of personal experience that whatever *Sankalpas* (resolves) have arisen in my

mind have been invariably fulfilled. I therefore approach the people for land-gifts with the faith that the Lord who dwells in me, dwells equally in the hearts of others. So I must reason with them to make them understand my mission. I must do so not once, twice, but again and again. Even Shankaracharya had no other weapon except that of reason. Ultimately we must rely on our power of persuasion."

He concluded with the words :

"Finally, a word about the goal we aim at and the work for which indeed we have gathered here. It is obvious that we aim at creating an ideal social order. The purification of the mind for our individual salvation cannot be the sole concern and purpose of our convening such a large gathering. Kripalaniji has explained it quite lucidly. He gave us a masterly analysis of the problem. Analysis is useful in elucidating the varying importance which is to be accorded to the various elements composing a thing. But that has its limitations. Ultimately it is in the synthetic product that we find the real satisfaction of a thing. Mere analysis might even rob the thing of its life. As normal human beings, we like *Modak* (sweet balls). Analytically it is just flour, ghee and sugar. But none would care to eat them separately or even as a simple mixture. We relish them in their peculiar preparation. In the same way we say that we have accepted this work because we want to change and revolutionise the society; and also because it will alleviate the miseries of the poor; and further again because we want to cleanse and purify our minds and hearts. Really it is like a piece of confectionery which we have prepared of all these purposes and accepted it in the hope that it will give us all that it may have to give.

"I hope that the followers of *Sarvodaya* who have gathered here will realize that Bhoodan comprehends

all that they want to do and success in this work will make for success in every other field of constructive effort."

With a new message and hope, constructive workers coming from different parts of the country left Sevapuri for their respective homes. They had now an ideal and a vision and an objective before them. A clear-cut programme was there. The ideology of *Sarvodaya* had taken a concrete shape. It was for them to live it and become ambassadors of goodwill and a new order.

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE DHARMA CHAKRA ROLLS ON

The Sevapuri Sammelan registered a landmark in the growth and development of the Bhoodan Yagna movement. It assumed an all-India character and Bhoodan message thereafter began to be conveyed to every nook and corner of the country. Vinoba who had covered 35 districts of U. P., now started for the remaining 15.

Leaving Sevapuri on April 20, 1952, he halted at Bhadohi in Benares district and entered Jaunpur district on 21st April. Four days after he came to Fyzabad district, where lies Ayodhya, the birth-place of Rama and home of many a legend. At Akbarpur, a sub-divisional town and the biggest Khadi-production centre of the *Gandhi Ashram*, Vinoba issued on April 28, 1952, an appeal to the nation in the course of which he observed :

> " I had been trying to find some field for experiments with non-violence since Gandhiji's death. I took part in the work of rehabilitating Meo Muslims with this very idea. It was a good experience. It encouraged me to go to Telangana. I saw there the vision of *Ahimsa* (Non-Violence) in the form of Bhoodan Yagna.
>
> "In the course of two months which I took to reach Delhi, I received some eighteen thousand acres of land. I then realized that the masses were eager to welcome non-violence.
>
> " At the request of friends of *Sarvodaya* in U. P., I ventured on this experiment of Bhoomidan Yagna in the larger field of U. P. We decided to collect, at the rate of five acres for a family, five lakh acres of land.... We have received more than one lakh acres by now. I see in this nothing but the hand of God.

He wills and welcomes this activity. Some of my companions also feel like that. The result is that the workers who met in the Sarvodaya Sammelan at Sevapuri have resolved to collect at least 25 lakh acres of land within the next two years.

"I am aware that the problem of India's landless labourers cannot be solved by merely distributing 25 lakh acres among them. It will require at least five crore acres to solve this problem. But if we can collect 25 lakhs as a first step, and thereby convey the message of non-violence to India's five lakh villages, I believe, it will create a favourable atmosphere for equitable distribution of land."

He concluded his appeal with the words :

"Fellow countrymen, I appeal to you all to contribute your share in the *Praja-sooya Yagna* and by making this mission successful, establish non-violence as the rule of society in the economic sphere. I make a claim of the correctness of this work for three reasons. It is in tune with the cultural traditions of India. It contains in it the seed of economic and social revolution. And, lastly it can help in the establishment of peace in the world.

"I know, I have no right to give a programme to the nation. I am not a leader to give a call to the nation. I am an humble devotee of God who regards the service of the poor as the way of the attainment of the highest goal of life. If Gandhiji were alive today, I would never have appeared before the public as I do today, but would have concentrated all my attention on scavenging village streets and on conducting my experiments of *Kanchan mukti* (elimination of money economy) through agriculture. Circumstances have compelled me to come out and be audacious enough to be an initiator of this great Yagna. But whether it is impertinence or humility

I dedicate it to God and request all my sisters and brothers to co-operate with me."

On May 1, Vinoba was at Fyzabad. As it was the labourers' day celebrated the world over, Vinoba dealt with the importance and dignity of labour and duty of one and all to perform it. In his post-prayer address he remarked :

"The work that I have taken up is labourers' work. This is a movement of the weakest, the landless and the mute. Labour movements are generally carried on in cities though we do find some peasant movements in Europe. But in India such movements are largely confined to cities. Our peasant labourers have no organisation at all. There is no awakening among them. They get no education. Except cultivation they know no other occupation. But the fields they cultivate are not their own. These labourers are at the lowest rung of the ladder and are regarded as the humblest of all classes. It is their cause that I have taken up.

"My movement is a labour movement. I am a labourer myself. I have passed 32 years of my life, verily the best years of my youth, as a labourer. I have performed several such callings which—though regarded very low and degraded by the society as below dignity—are highly necessary and important, *e.g.*, scavenging, weaving, carpentry, farming etc. My work can solve the land problem, increase food production, ensure justice, organise villages, produce good effect on official machinery, develop the religious feeling of the people and give a sound shape to the tendencies of kindness and generosity as also to their undeveloped and latent moral content."

Eight days later when Vinoba reached Lucknow, the capital of U. P., it happened to be the *Buddha Jayanti* day (birth anniversary of Lord Buddha). He laid bare his heart in the post-prayer address wherein he said :

"The life and teachings of Buddha have begun to attract the attention of the world afresh in our days. The lesson which he taught was ignored in his own age and even till our own days. But his teaching has not died. It had laid like a seed covered by earth and awaiting the season for germination. After 2,500 years, we see it sprout today.

"From the time of Buddha upto the appearance of Gandhi, hundreds of saints have borne personal witness and demonstrated the truth of the teaching that anger is conquered by calmness, fear by fearlessness, and enmity by love. But they had remained till now as examples confined to individuals. They were like laboratory experiments. The wider application of these principles to society and its problems had not taken place.

"In the meantime physical science developed by leaps and bounds. It enabled its votaries to overrun various countries of the world. The British conquered India, and performed the unprecedented feat of disarming the entire nation. If arms alone could help a people to bring about its liberation, the slavery of India for all time was inevitable. Thus it became imperative to forge a weapon which could break the bonds of slavery inspite of, the lack of arms. India then applied on the social scale the individual experience of saints, and brought about her liberation. It is the first grand miracle of non-violence."

Throwing more light on this point, he added :

"I do not claim that India became independent simply by her non-violence. As is said in the *Gita*, five factors are needed for bringing about any result. All that I claim is that India's non–violent movement was a major factor in bringing about her independence. This is proved by the events that have followed independence, events which are all attri-

The Dharma chakra rolls on .

butable to non-violence and which can all be claimed as further examples of its miraculous consequences."

Vinoba continued :

" Now we are independent, we are free to weigh up and choose any of the many ways open to us for refashioning our society. We are a big nation ; and our responsibilities are as big. Each of us has got to find an answer to the central problem of our country, which is : what means shall we adopt for its economic and social re-construction ?

" We have to decide which are the proper means to follow for solving the several problems with which we are faced. If we take to evil means for achieving good ends, there can be no end to our problems. On the other hand if we take to non-violent means, all problems will be resolved in due course and be no more, not only in India, but in the world. This is why I want to resolve the land problem peacefully. It is no small problem. I ask people to give the land they have. I do not beg it though as a *Brahman* I am privileged to do so. I would have begged, had I been asking for it for myself. When, however, I ask for it as a representative of the poor, I do not beg ; but I claim to teach the people their duty of divesting themselves of their extra riches. And I have come to believe that God is using me, weak though I am, to complete the task which He had commenced through Buddha. "

Next, he declared in a firm voice :

" The work I am made to do is the continuation of the *Dharma Chakra Pravartan*—revolving the wheel of *Dharma*, which Buddha had started. And mark what I pronounce with the same commanding voice as that of the lion which drowns all other smaller voices and rings clear across the forest : *The land has already come to me; it has already gone to the*

*landless. It remains for you only to choose the manner of effecting the transfer.*"

Then he pointed out :

" The equal sharing of wealth is the cry of the age and it will come to be. Land will have to be redivided. I have no doubt that it can be done peacefully. I can see it quite clearly and this is why I speak so confidently about it; and this is why I ask you to wake up, for as Tulsidas sang to Ram : 'The day is dawning and the birds on the trees are chirping merrily, and it is time when gifts should be made to the poor; so awake, Oh Ram !'

" While all over the world outside nations are busy slandering one another and grabbing whatever they can, here in India begins the dawn of a new and happier age, the age of giving, and the indwelling Lord is waking up. Hence I am sure that if we keep patience and continue to work with faith and courage, this idea and the truth it embodies will certainly go forth from here and encompass the world. But for that we will have to emulate the zeal and faith and the spirit of sacrifice of the great disciples of Buddha. We should apply ourselves to this fresh revolution of the wheel of *Dharma* with the same devotion. And if we are able to do so, we will impart a new and a better shape to the world. "

Leaving Lucknow and passing through Unnao district, Vinoba reached Kanpur on May 13th. On the way from Unnao town to Kanpur city he dropped for a few minutes at Sri Manzar Ali Sokhta's *Sevakunj Ashram* where the party had a breakfast. In keeping with its reputation, Kanpur offered Vinoba a right royal reception. Nay, it was the first place where Vinoba obtained the full quota of a district on the very first day. The District Bhoodan Committee of Kanpur presented *Danpatras* of about 13,000 acres of land. Vinoba then raised the Kanpur quota to one lakh acres and so also he did

in other U. P. districts which fell on his way later. At Kanpur, Vinoba also performed the opening ceremony of a Harijan colony built by Kanpur Development Borad saying :

> " The reputation of your town is not going to be founded on your giant and multi-storeyed buildings but on the habitations of the Harijans. Those who have no strength enjoy the strength of God. On serving them we earn God's grace. The weakest organ of our body is our sole strength. *Bhangi* is our heart. If it ' fails ', society will also cease to be, one day. "

Pleased at the quantity of land offered to him by Kanpur people, Vinoba told them that that was not enough. He also called upon them to provide 2,000 pairs of bullocks for the sake of 2,000 families who would be getting that land.

The last halt in Kanpur district was at Pukhrayan where on May 17, 1952, Vinoba distributed land to the landless—first event of its kind in U. P. Rules and regulations of land distribution, as framed by Vinoba, are given in Appendix C. The land distribution meeting at Pukhrayan began at 9 a.m. Vinoba opened it with the words :

> " We have met here to execute a very happy and noble programme. We are going to distribute the land received in *Bhoodan* to the landless and unemployed. It should be done with utmost love and justice, and I hope that more gifts will come forth in case there is need for them."

And they actually did come forth. For the land to be distributed was only 10 bighas while there were eight families who claimed it. Vinoba appealed to the people to rise equal to the occasion so that all the eight might get land. The appeal had a wholesome effect. Some who had given land earlier raised their figures higher while new donations were also announced. Thus 43 bighas were available in no time. They were distributed as under :

TABLE IV

| No. | Name of Donee | Members in the family | Land distributed (in Bighas) | Survey No. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sri Kali Charan (Kachi) | 5 | 5.0 | 252 & 253 |
| 2 | „ Lalloo (Kachi) | 5 | 5.1 | 282 |
| 3 | „ Sakthoo (Chamar) | 5 | 4.9 | 285 |
| 4 | „ Ramsanehi (Shukla) | 6 | 6.5 | 239 & 241 |
| 5 | „ Ramdin (Math) | 7 | 6.925 | 237 & 277 |
| 6 | „ Kamta (Kachi) | 4 | 3.975 | 238 & 220 |
| 7 | „ Ram Sahai (Chamar) | 4 | 4.575 | 284 |
| 8 | „ Mannalal (Misra) | 8 | 7.2 | 232 |
| | | 44 | 43.175 | |

Winding up the proceedings, amidst touching scenes of joy and elation, Vinoba said:

"Blessed are they who have received, but twice blessed are they who gave it. The landless, in any case, are bound to get land, through other means if not through *Bhoodan.* But this revelation of Ram, the immanent lord, who dwells in the heart of every being, is unique. And that is the great glory of the method we follow. I will ask the givers to regard the poor as members of a common village family and serve them. People say that this is *Kaliyuga*, *i. e.*, age of sin and degradation, but I say that an age is what we make it to be. The spirit is the same, equal and indivisible everywhere. This is the great truth which has become evident to us today. I undertook this work with great faith but without attachment. If I had attachment, I would have despaired long ago. May be I too would have transferred my allegiance from faith in the cause and in oneself to that in legislation and government machinery. Thank God that this did not happen and I remain free and independent. I ask for land, I get it and I give it."

Leaving Kanpur district, Vinoba entered, on May 18th, Bundelkhand area, famous for songs and folk–lores. It has four districts in U. P.—Jhansi, Jalaun, Hamirpur and Banda. Jhansi, the gateway to U. P. in the south–west, was covered when Vinoba was on his way to Delhi. Now he came to Jalaun district where he spent four days. Next Hamirpur district. Crossing the Betwa he encamped at Italia on 23rd May. Before reaching Italia, at breakfast hour, Vinoba was presented with 101 acres of land by the residents of a village, Mangroth, two miles away from the spot. Accepting the gift and saying that 'सबै भूमि गोपालकी' (All land belongs to Gopal), Vinoba marched on. The words seized the heart of those of Mangroth. Fortunately they have in their midst Diwan Shatrughana Singh, who, a descendant of a rich and respectable family of that village, by his meritorious services in the cause of the country for the last thirty years and more,has won a permanent place in their heart. He told them that he proposed to offer to Vinoba his entire land in the village. He also appealed to them to do likewise, transform the village into one family, earn the gratitude of generations to come and win an immortal name for their beloved village. This had its effect. Of the 105 families in Mangroth, population 585, 65 families owned land while 40 were landless. At Dewanji's persuasion, 64 of them agreed to donate their land to *Vinoba Baba*. *Danpatras* were filled in and on 24th May they were presented to Vinoba at Rath. A miracle had happened! The people of Mangroth had stood up to the ideal that all land belongs to Him. Vinoba was deeply moved, almost as much as on 18th April 1951 when he was given the first Bhoodan. Humbly he accepted the Mangroth offer. The story of Mangroth is a romance in itself. Under Vinoba's direct guidance is being born a new Mangroth which would act in times to come as a lighthouse of the *Gram Raj* of tomorrow.

Banda is the district of Tulsidas of imperishable fame and glory. His *Ramayana* is admired and adored by hundreds of millions all over the country. The workers of Banda district presented Vinoba with about 20,000 acres of land and promised to collect another 80,000 shortly. On 30th May at

Banda town, Sri Jai Prakash Narain, the well-known socialist leader, fresh from the Pachmarhi convention of the Socialist Party of India, interviewed Vinoba. In Vinoba's prayer meeting he declared:

"After 30th January, 1948, one felt that the inspiration which enthused us to sacrifice and suffering had gone for good. But it is again being now felt that we can solve our problems by non-violence. I trust that through this instrument of Bhoodan Yagna, the two currents of Gandhism and Socialism would meet like Ganga and Jamuna and contribute to India's prosperity and betterment."

This was a prelude to the conversion which was to follow a few months after, culminating in Sri Jai Prakash's turning into a gallant and eloquent champion of Vinoba's mission.

On 7th June, 1952, Vinoba entered Fatehpur district. Exactly 36 years ago, he had, as has been already noted, met Gandhiji for the first time. Recalling the event Vinoba remarked.

"I was then a little boy. Since that time until today I have been working according to his behest."

Passing through the districts of Fatehpur, Raebareli, Sultanpur and Pratapgarh, Vinoba entered Allahabad district on 23rd June, 1952, and encamped at Shivagarh where Sri Purshotamdas Tandon, amongst others, was there to receive him. Welcoming him, Tandonji remarked:

"The work that this *tapaswi*, an embodiment of sacrifice, Vinoba being his name, has begun is an epoch-making one. A new type of beggar has come to our door. Around him is being built a new devotional atmosphere which is very revolutionary."

In his evening prayer address, Vinoba observed:

"Mine is the bee-like way to obtain Bhoodan without hurting anybody. I believe that true good of one cannot clash against the true good of the

other. Nor can the good of one country go against that of the other. One's good can only result in another's good.

"I do not want to acquire land merely but to win so many hearts. One who donates by love donates not only land but also his heart and becomes a partner in a common endeavour."

Then in a solemn voice, he said :

"I have resolved not to take rest without completing this work."

On 24th June, Vinoba reached Allahabad city. It was raining heavily. To the crowd gathered at his camp he said that he demanded one lakh acres from that great district. In the evening as usual, he addressed a public meeting after prayer in the Purshotamdas Park which has been the venue of many a historical gathering during the last 33 years. As Allahabad is known to be one of the most highly educated and cultured cities of India, Vinoba placed the picture of his *Samya Yoga* before that intelligent gathering and lucidly explained the details of the programme which was to be followed to attain the same.

At Allahabad, Vinoba also addressed a zamindars' meeting, a workers' meeting, a women's meeting, a literary gathering and a press conference. Next, halting at Karchana, Meja Road and Bampur he left Allahabad district in the morning of 27th June. He had been presented with 27,561 acres in this district, the highest given by any district in his tour so far. Appealing to raise it to one lakh at least, Vinoba pointed out :

"We must obtain five crores as early as possible. Nobody or no institution can accomplish this work alone. Therefore, workers of all groups, parties or affiliations must take interest in it. God puts his devotees to trial. But He has given me far more than I deserve. I have not picked up this work thinking it easy. It is the hardest possible task of our time.

I am performing it as a religious object. I have decided to carry it on, come what may to my body. Now I want you all to co-operate with me in it. Should such a revolutionary work fail to stir you to activity it would mean I must prepare for a greater self-sacrifice."

Mirzapur, the last district in Vinoba's itinerary, is U. P.'s largest district with hills and jungles inhabited by landless and poor aboriginies. Vinoba asked workers to join the Bhoodan work for it was the only programme which must needs be done after *Swaraj*. On July 1, 1952, when U. P. Government was celebrating Zamindari Abolition Day in the province, Vinoba was at Chunar, a sub-divisional town in Mirzapur district. The official festivities of the day did not even touch Vinoba. In his evening prayer meeting, he feelingly declared :

"Some of you might have celebrated the day. But what had I to celebrate ? So long as there are the distressed landless amongst us there is nothing to rejoice at their sad plight. Zamindari-abolition has brought land to those who cultivated it. Only they were not its owners. Now they would be owners too. It is right that land has passed from the big zamindars' hands to the peasants'. But what of it to the landless who are regarded as untouchable from every point of view ? We can be happy only when we are able to do something for these *Daridranarayan*. What can I speak today to them, the afflicted ones ? Had I learnt that descending from the heavens, Ganga had, instead of being held up in Shankar's tuft of hair, come down and become accessible to one and all, I would have been glad. But so long as the boil in the foot is not alright what is the sense in pasting sandal to the whole body ? The landless millions of our country are like the boil in our foot. At present we should devote ourselves to make them happy. The life that they are leading is miserable beyond words. They can feel elated

only when we make some sacrifice for their sake. You will find that in case you render them even a little service they would become your life-long servants ready to lay their life for you. A citizen of India can become a world citizen only when he does something for his landless brethren."

On 4th July, 1952, Vinoba re-entered Benares City where he stayed on for more than two months to pass the rainy season. He encamped at Kashi Vidyapith. On his way to the city he passed through Ramnagar, the old headquarters of Benares State. The Rajah who had donated 8,500 acres when Vinoba came to Benares earlier on the eve of the Sevapuri Sammelan, donated another 1,500. The total land collected in the country by that time amounted to 2,96,634 acres as per details below :

TABLE V

| No | State | Land (in acres) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Uttar Pradesh .. .. | 2,54,305 |
| 2 | Hyderabad .. .. | 18,132 |
| 3 | Madhya Pradesh .. .. | 8,290 |
| 4 | Vindhya Pradesh .. .. | 1,038 |
| 5 | Bengal .. .. | 32 |
| 6 | Punjab–Pepsu .. .. | 61 |
| 7 | Delhi .. .. | 1,108 |
| 8 | Madras .. .. | 7,119 |
| 9 | Gujarat .. .. | 2,549 |
| 10 | Orissa .. .. | 1,000 |
| 11 | Madhya Bharat .. .. | 2,000 |
| 12 | Rajasthan .. .. | 1,000 |
| | Total .. | 2,96,634 |

The amounts of land-gifts donated to Vinoba in his tour after the Sevapuri Sammelan surpassed the previous figures. As has already been noted, from Kanpur onwards he asked several districts to offer one lakh acres each. An

idea of the growing pace of the movement can be had from the following table which shows the daily average of gifts obtained by Vinoba in the course ot his travels through Telangana and then on to Kashi Vidyapith :

TABLE VI

| No. | Region | Days taken | Land obtained ( in acres ) | Daily average ( in acres ) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Telangana .. | 60 | 12,201 | 203 |
| 2 | On to Delhi .. | 64 | 19,436 | 303 |
| 3 | Meerut to Sitapur .. | 91 | 28,308 | 311 |
| 4 | Bahraich to Sevapuri .. | 49 | 46,088 | 940 |
| 5 | Sevapuri to Vidyapith .. | 76 | 1,68,643 | 2,219 |

Vinoba stayed at Kashi Vidyapith for 70 days. Daily he used to go for his morning walk after prayer. The evening prayer was held in the Vidyapith compound. One day in the third week of August, he happened to go towards the time–old sacred bathing ghats of the Ganga at Kashi. He found men and women easing themselves there and it was all so dirty and stinking that he could not bear it. Thereupon he requested the residents of Kashi to keep their town clean and neat and gave a call for *Swachha Bharat* (Clean India ). On 7th September, Vinoba, walking down from the Vidyapith, reached Rajghat at 4-30 a. m. A large assemblage was there to undertake with him the cleaning work with brooms, baskets, spades and buckets etc. From Rajghat to Trilochan, Telianala and on to Harishchandra Ghat, the work was carried on for three hours. Then he addressed the huge crowd gathered there, pointed out the dire necessity of cleanliness and its unique place in our daily life. He appealed to his audience to devote at least 15 minutes a day to this urgent task.

In the evening of 9th September, 1952, passed away, at Wardha, Acharya Kishorlal Ghanshyamdas Mashruwala.

The sad news was conveyed to Vinoba at about 9 p. m. In his death the country lost a devoted servant, very much like its living conscience. But for Vinoba the loss was as much personal. To quote him :

> " A summary of my speeches etc., was forwarded to him. I never went through it and I had authorised Kishorlalbhai to modify, change or correct it as he thought fit. I wonder whether I can put so much faith as regards thought in any body else....
>
> " If anybody gave himself completely to Bhoodan work it was he. His very presence at Wardha gave me strength. That strength I would continue to get...... In *Gita* there is a mention of action in non-action. Kishorlalbhai was an example of it.... I feel he belonged to the category of Buddha Bhagwan."

Two days after, fell Vinoba's birthday. About 500 workers from different districts of U. P. were there to offer him their respectful homage and also to receive his message on the eve of his departure for Bihar. On that day Vinoba made the resolve not to go back to his *Paramdham Ashram* until the land problem of the country was solved. Addressing the workers assembled there, he said :

> " The seers of the old and the *Gita* prescribe three things. *Yagna* (sacrifice), *Dan* (charity) and *Tapa* (austerity). Of these, through Bhoodan, I called for two, *Yagna* and *Dan*. But unless we insist on *Tapa*, *Yagna* and *Dan* will not he fulfilled. The three together constitute one indivisible whole. It is for the workers to do the *Tapa*. *Yagna* and *Dan* are expected from the people. It is for us to intensify the *Tapa*. I was, therefore, deeply searching within myself as to what we could do in this respect. And I feel I should relate to you what came to me from these musings.
>
> " I had often said in the words of Hanuman :
>
> ' There can be no rest for me till Ram's work is done.'

"I pursued the idea and eventually reached the conclusion that I should do some act of sacrifice. And then *I resolved that until this problem was satisfactorily solved I should give up the idea of going back to my Ashram.* The Ashram is a place steeped up in the flavour of renunciation and *Tapa*. It was there that I carried on unceasingly my work in the service of the poor and of the country. Even today the Ashram is carrying on the most revolutionary experiment of our times, the experiment of *Kanchan mukti*. Yet the Ashram does afford us a kind of protection too. And I felt that I should leave off this protection as a form of attachment. Thus I made this resolve and now I am dedicating it to the Lord in your presence."

He closed his remarks with the words:

"If we have love for the Indian culture, non-violence, *Sarvodaya* and all else which they imply, we must needs apply ourselves ever more to the Bhoodan work. Then only can we revivify and speed up other items of constructive work. Failing that, they are bound to fade away. That was how I came to leave the Ashram and wander about my present mission. I ask all those who consider themselves to be the disciples of Gandhiji to think over it and see if what I have done is correct or otherwise. And if they adjudge my work to be right, they should give me their full co-operation. Just as they used to leave off their individual activities to join the Satyagraha campaign when Bapu launched one, even so should they co-operate in this movement with the same joy and zeal which a fighter feels as he hears the battle cry. I also call upon others to give me as much help as they can."

Next day, Vinoba left Kashi Vidyapith for Bihar. On 12th, he was at Moghalsarai. In his post-prayer meeting, he gave a brief speech that evening, in the course of which he said:

"I want the workers to take the pledge that so long as the land problem is not solved they would mainly

carry on Bhoodan Yagna work as their life-work. This pledge would be for U. P. But I would sign it first. Those of you who sign it should do it after due deliberation. I do not expect a long list."

He also observed that in Kishorlalbhai we had such a one who fulfilled that pledge. His example was well worth emulation. On that day and the one following, several workers signed that pledge.

Saturday, September 13, 1952. Vinoba's last day in U.P. He was camping at Syedraja. A few miles away flew the Karamnasa river across which lay the Arrah (Shahabad) district of Bihar. Touching scenes marked the day at Syedraja. Vinoba was to leave the company of these workers next day and was to be joined by another one from Bihar.

During his stay in U. P., Vinoba went round every district except Almora. In all, he encamped at 257 places in U. P., covered 3,750 miles and obtained 2,95,028 acres. Besides he was donated 231 wells, one tube-well, 34 bullock-pairs, six houses, one bungalow and one Dharamshala, eleven ploughs and a thousand rupee worth agricultural tools, four persian wheels, 1,30,000 bricks, 15 bags of cement, four ponds, 531 trees as also trees worth Rs. 15,500 and several maunds of seeds. Over and above, he was given *Shram dan* also. The total land collections in the country at that time amounted to a little less than four lakh acres. In his post-prayer address, reviewing the work done in U. P. during the last eleven months, Vinoba said :

"More than 12,000 donors have donated about three lakh acres of land. If there are devotees to ask for land, it is surely obtainable. This is God's own work. And if you would do this work God's blessings would be with you. This is not Vinoba, but God speaking through him. What strength God is giving me, He is also giving it to you. But the difference is that whereas you cannot recognize that strength, I can. He puts us on trial. If

workers undergo some suffering and hardship to meet this ordeal they would be able to carry out successfully a non-violent revolution."

The parting hour had come. Early in the morning of the 14th, Vinoba left Syedraja. Before day-break he reached the bank of the Karamnasa river. Stars were twinkling in the sky. A fine soothing breeze was blowing. A serene calmness was in the air. The murmuring music of the Karamnasa current added to the depth and grandeur of the scene. A simple and innocent boat from the simple and innocent Bihar was ready to carry Vinoba away from Uttar Pradesh into the dark interior countryside of Bihar. Tears were rolling down the eyes of all those present. A sweet smile sparkled on Vinoba's face and he seemed to be out for greater conquests ahead. In a voice quivering with deep emotion and humility, he gratefully told his U. P. companions :

"When the atmosphere was not ready you had the courage to resolve to collect five lakhs. And for this work of Ram you left no nerve unstrained. The blessings of the Almighty are with you !"

With folded hands he took up his seat in the boat. And the *Dharma Chakra* rolled on.

CHAPTER IX

# THE GREAT RESOLVE

As Vinoba turned towards Bihar, he told the workers gathered to receive him :

> "You had decided to collect four lakh acres. That was just a beginning (श्रीगणेशाय नमः). But I desire that Bihar's land problem must now be solved for good. There are 17 districts in this province with a population of four crores. I want 50 lakh acres from here. Only then can be solved the issue of the landless of Bihar."

Crossing the Karamnasa, he entered the Shahabad district of Bihar. The halt of the day was at Durgavati. When he received the first Bhoodan at the village school of Dhanecha, he said :

> "Bihar is a land of the poor. There is the dire need to perform here this great Yagna now. Four lakhs is the elementary step. What is required is to solve the land problem."

Swelling crowds of people, including women mostly in *purdah*, greeted Vinoba on the way. With hope and cheer they had their *darshan* of the new *Baba*—who gave away land—marching past along their homes and lanes. A huge mass was there at Durgavati to offer him a very cordial welcome. In a short and sweet speech, Vinoba called upon the people to share with others what they had and regard the village as a single family. In the noon he addressed Bihar workers who had come from all parts of the province to listen to his message. He warned them :

> "Should you yet keep yourself engrossed in little matters you will find that the earth under your feet has slipped off. In this province I would do ask for

land. But I would also insist on good workers. In U. P., I began this work late. Here I am doing it in the very beginning."

In his post-prayer address in the evening, Vinoba remarked :

"As a pilgrim goes to a *Tirtha*—pilgrimage for God's *darshan*—so also I have come out on Bhoodan pilgrimage. For me you who are sitting before me are God."

Explaining his revolutionary message he pointed out :

"So far we were habituated to 'taking' things. Now I am telling you about 'giving'. *Dan* or generosity is essential in life, otherwise *Rog* (disease) cannot but follow *Bhog* (indulgence). The nature of that disease would not merely be physical and mental but also social. Hence I have come here to let you bring about a revolution on the basis of love."

On 18th September, when Vinoba was camping at Dhamar, he issued an appeal to the people of Bihar to contribute to Bhoodan Yagna. He told them :

"I had demanded four lakh acres from Bihar as the first instalment. That demand stands. But that much is not going to satisfy me. I have gone far, far ahead. I have a desire that the land problem of Bihar should be solved during my stay here. Should I continue going round the country collecting a few acres or so everywhere, when will the object be achieved? But if we do wholesome work even in one state, that would easily solve the problem of the whole country. Our ancestors have already said, 'Control one, control all.' Hence I feel that if you so wish and are ready to co-operate with me I would proceed ahead only after bringing the Bihar revolution to a successful finish........

"My first demand is from traders, bankers, ministers, members of legislatures, office bearers of the Congress

and other parties and other responsible leaders. They should commence this work by offering me one-sixth of the land they own. They will then find how the entire atmosphere is changed instantaneously....

" I am talking of the solution of the land problem. But far more important thing is working the non-violent method. If we are able to solve the land problem by the method of love and peace, it would earn credit for non-violence. Could non-violence succeed in attaining economic revolution, what else would it not be able to achieve ? I have complete faith in the power of non-violence. Come on, recollecting Gandhiji, let us invoke non-violence which was first discovered in India in Bihar and which after Gandhiji's departure we had almost forgotten.

" Jai *Ahimsa* ! Jai Bihar ! Jai Hind ! ! ! "

Vinoba remained in Shahabad district up to October 1, 1952. Then spending four days in Patna district he came to Chapra, the headquarters of Saran district, on October 6. In his prayer meeting at Chapra, he said that besides land-redistribution he was as much interested in the development of villages industries. He declared :

" I do not take merely Ram's name, but I say *Sitaram.* This means that together with land-redistribution, I also want village industries. Often they say that village goods are costly. But the truth is that the article produced in a mill after depriving people of their job, rendering them unemployed and compelling them to starve, is not cheap but verily dear. In case the mill is charged with the task of feeding all those unemployed, mill product would come to be very costly. Calculate all the expenses incurred on mill cloth in order to make its production possible, and then say whether it is cheap or dear ! Also stolen material is invariably cheap while the one produced by labour is costly.

Because poison is cheap and *amrita* (nectar) is dear, would you purchase poison? "

Remaining for more than a fortnight in Saran district, Vinoba entered the city of Patna on 23rd October, and stayed there for three days. As evident from his utterances ever since he entered Bihar, Vinoba was earnestly thinking of tackling Bihar's land problem seriously. A clue to his mind can be had from what he once said :

" I thought if I continue to tour the country in this way, I will get two to three lakh acres every year, but at this rate, in five to six years which I would need for touring India, I will have collected at the most ten to twenty lakh acres only. Collecting ten to twenty lakh acres, however, cannot solve the problem. Times were moving fast and if we did not keep pace with them and solve the problem within a specified time our efforts would be in vain; that is, though we might succeed in bringing help and relief to some here and there, yet we would fail in achieving our object of ushering in a new social order based on justice. It was, therefore, evident that somewhere we must concentrate and try for the full solution of the problem. And I felt that Bihar should be an ideal place for this experiment. "

But the response Bihar gave in the beginning was not happy. In Vinoba's words :

" Our initial experience in Bihar was not quite encouraging. It appeared as though we had come up against a rock. But it did not depress me. For two months, in spite of our best efforts, the results were very meagre, so much so that in Saran district we could raise only a thousand acres in spite of the fact that our President, who hails from that district, himself issued an appeal urging the people to do their utmost for the success of Bhoodan in Bihar and specially in Saran. There were days when we

got only two or three acres. Nevertheless I persisted in my determination in making Bihar a test case for proving the efficacy of Bhoodan as the weapon for working out the socio economic revolution. "

On 23rd October, he declared at Patna the great resolve he had now made—*resolve not to leave Bihar province until its land problem was solved.* It is a very unusual event in these times. Its importance has gradually dawned upon the people all over the country. History may well record Vinoba's resolve as the most momentous and epoch-making decision ever taken by any citizen of India after she became a Republic.

Next day, he gave public expression to and placed before the people the idea of *Sampattidan Yagna.* To quote Vinoba :

> " As the work of Bhoodan progressed it became increasingly clear that the idea behind the movement could not be fulfilled unless we went further and asked for a portion of wealth and property. And hence, I made up my mind that I must also ask for a share of wealth and property from the people. I have now done it and placed my demand at one-sixth of it; but it is upto the people to decide what they can and will give me. "

He added :

> " I also do not envisage creating trusts as is often done in the case of funds collected for public good. There is another vital difference between these funds which are raised from time to time for various purposes and this *Sampattidan Yagna.* It is this, that a portion of the income will have to be donated to this recurringly, year after year. I have, therefore, decided that the money will remain with the donor himself, but he will use it as we want him to do and annually render us the account. "

On 25th October, the Bihar State Congress Committee unanimously passed a resolution supporting the Bhoodan Yagna movement. It was the first time that any State Congress gave a serious thought to this movement and took a definite step for the same. The resolution reads :

> " This meeting of the Bihar State Congress Committee pays its hearty tribute to Sant Vinoba's Bhoodan Yagna and regards the same as its good fortune. Of all states, Vinobaji has first chosen Bihar where he wants to solve the entire land problem through Bhoodan Yagna.
>
> " In order to carry out this work in the shortest possible time this Committee resolves that four lakh acres of land must be obtained in Bhoodan by 28th February, 1953. It, therefore, calls upon the subordinate Congress Committees, all Congress workers and Congress members of legislatures to do the needful required to complete the quota of their respective areas by the aforesaid period. With a view to make the work a success, the Committee feels it necessary that all Congressmen should donate one-sixth of their land at the earliest moment and devote themselves to implement it. The Committee hopes that co-operation of all institutions, parties or groups and workers interested in this work would be available for the same. This Committee authorises the Executive Committee to make necessary arrangements to give a practical shape to this decision." (*Jree rendering from Hindi*)

This resolution was moved by Shri Baidyanath Prasad Choudhury, secretary of the Bihar P. C. C., and now exclusively devoted to Bhoodan Yagna work, and seconded by Shri Prabhunath Singh. Another important event of the same day was a resolution about Bhoodan unanimously passed at the meeting of Sarvodaya workers of Bihar. What is significant is that it was moved by Shri Chand Saheb, president of the Bihar Praja Socialist Party and seconded by Shri Jagat Narain Lal, a Congress leader of eminent standing.

Thus within three fortnights after Vinoba's entry into Bihar, the stage was set up for a non-violent revolution in this remarkable province, the land of Janaka, Buddha and Mahavira, as also of Gandhi. But Vinoba knew no peace. The fire in his heart grew brighter day by day. He now thought of concentrating in one particular district. With this in mind, he entered Gaya district at Jahanabad on 28th October. After deep meditation he declared, on 31st October, that he wanted one lakh acres from this district of Buddha Bhagwan. As Vinoba later said :

> " And when I entered the Gaya district, I resolved that this district, which was the scene of Lord Buddha's austerities and which is sacred to crores of Hindus as the place where they offer *Shradha* to their forbears, should be asked to collect one lakh acres as the first instalment. I expressed this feeling to the workers who approved of it and accepted to work for it. "

On November 2, Vinoba was in Gaya town and on the following day at Bodh-Gaya, the city of Lord Buddha, where he performed his *Tapasya* and obtained enlightenment. In his post prayer address, Vinoba said that the place had given him the 'joy of feeling Buddha's presence.' Explaining his mission he implored the people to contribute their mite to the Bhoodan Yagna bounteously :

> "Let me tell you that I am following the footprints of the Buddha. The essence of Buddha's teaching is to deliver the unhappy amongst us from their misery, to render succour to those who lived uncared for as the castaways of society. This is also the teaching of the *Vedas* and the saints. We have now to practise this teaching, and hence I have taken up the land problem. I invite you all to co-operate with me and carry this task to a successful conclusion. "

Thus it was that Bhoodan work was taken up in Gaya district on an intensive basis. Vinoba relieved his secretary, Sri Damodardas Mundada, from his staff and asked him to

speed up the work there. A Gaya District Bhoodan Collection Committee, with Sri Gauri Shanker Saran Singh as chairman, was also formed to execute the project.

After Gaya district, Vinoba came to Palamau district on November 12. The last halt of this district was at Chandwa inhabited by aboriginies. There on November 22, Vinoba received no less than four hundred *Dan patras*, the highest number on any single day thus far. Next he entered Ranchi district. A zamindar of this district, Lal Saheb of Palkot, offered his services for the Bhoodan Yagna, giving himself heart and soul to the movement. At Tiril in this district, addressing a students' conference on November 30, Vinoba said :

> "I want students to discuss the idea of *Sampatti Dan* among their friends and propagate it intensively. Thereafter wealth or property would also be donated like land. And it would come in such an abundance as we will not be able to find means to dispose it off. It would acquire such an extensive shape and character. And ultimately there will come a time when people will part away their wealth to the needy without caring for the morrow because when he requires it next day he too would get it. It is only for the sake of facility that wealth is lying with individuals. Everybody has a right over it. As the same man keeps his money in different banks on account of convenience, so also wealth should also be kept in different houses. We have to bring about this state. Today it appears like a dream. Dreams are pleasant and when they are turned into reality, reality also becomes pleasant and relishing. This idea can find a deep place in our heart. It is finding that."

Vinoba entered Singhbhum district on 3rd December. A week after he fell ill. He grew so weak that he could not walk. But he insisted on maintaining his programme. Then he took to the bullock-cart and leaving Singhbhum district on the 13th, reached Kanderbera in Manbhum district. Next day he came to Chandil. But his condition worsened and there was no question of going anywhere, on foot or otherwise. He

stayed on at Chandil until the fifth session of *Sarvodaya Samaj,* held there on March 7, 8 and 9, 1953.

In his first post-prayer speech after this illness, on 30th December, 1952, Vinoba dwelt upon certain aspects of Sampattidan Yagna, as raised by a correspondent. Said Vinoba :

> "We aim at nothing less than obliterating the distinction between the rich and the poor. God in His infinite bounty has certainly given one thing or another to each one of us. Then why should not every one share a portion of that God-given thing with others ? I am sure that Sampattidan Yagna will also bring forth the same strength and power as did the Bhoodan movement."

Vinoba's illness gave an impetus to the Bhoodan workers. He asked the workers all over the country to carry on their work dispassionately and with great zeal. The following table shows the land collections in the country month to month for the period between the Sammelans of Sevapuri and Chandil, *i. e.,* May 1952 to April 1953.

TABLE VII

| No. | Month | Land Collected (acres) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Total up to 30th April, 1952. | 1,02,361 |
| 2 | May | 75,155 |
| 3 | June | 1,19,118 |
| 4 | July | 47,854 |
| 5 | August | 5,554 |
| 6 | September | 27,915 |
| 7 | October | 6,980 |
| 8 | November | 37,721 |
| 9 | December | 40,761 |
| 10 | January, 1953. | 43,265 |
| 11 | February | 1,76,569 |
| 12 | March–April | 4,70,103 |
| Total up to 10th April, 1953 | | 11,53,356 |

Bihar's initial quota was four lakh acres. Vinoba raised it to 32 lakhs, the minimum required to tackle Bihar's land problem. It was distributed among the 17 districts of Bihar as under :

TABLE VIII

| No. | District | Quota (in lakh acres) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Saran | 1.00 |
| 2. | Champaran | 1.50 |
| 3. | Muzaffarpur | 1.25 |
| 4. | Darbhanga | 1.25 |
| 5. | Purnea | 3.00 |
| 6. | Monghyr | 1.50 |
| 7. | Saharsa | 1.00 |
| 8. | Patna | 1.00 |
| 9. | Gaya | 3.00 |
| 10. | Shahabad | 2.00 |
| 11. | Bhagalpur | 1.50 |
| 12. | Hazaribagh | 3.00 |
| 13. | Ranchi | 3.00 |
| 14. | Manbhum | 2.00 |
| 15. | Singhbhum | 1.50 |
| 16. | Palamau | 1.50 |
| 17. | Santhal Pargana | 3.00 |
| | Total | 32.00 |

A very imporant event occurring about the close of 1952 was Sri Jayaprakash Narain's declaration to devote his time and energy to the Bhoodan Yagna movement. In fact, he was largely instrumental in the Socialist Party's passing a resolution in support of the movement at its Pachmarhi convention held in May, 1952.

Equally remarkable was the effect of the movement on the richer land-owning section of Bihar. The Raja of Ramgarh saw Vinoba at Chandil on 26th January, 1953, and promised to donate one lakh acres. His *Dan patra* was duly

filled in on 6th March, a day before the Sarvodaya Sammelan began. Also he assured Vinoba that he would persuade others of his fraternity to do likewise.

The Chandil Sarvodaya Conference was presided over by Sri Dhirendra Mazumdar. Of the three resolutions presented before the assemblage, one, dealing with prohibition, appealed to the Governments not to slacken their efforts and go ahead in this direction. The other two* were in connection with Bhoodan and *Gram Raj*. The former resolution not only reiterated the decision taken last year—to collect 25 lakhs of acres of land by April, 1954—but also resolved the establishment of an 'exploitation-free' and 'equality-full' society by the aquisition of five crores of acres before 1957 and appealed to the young men and women of the country to join this silent and solid revolution. The other held forth that *Sarvodaya Samaj* 'could only be brought into being through the establishment of *Gram Raj*' for which 'decentralisation of political as well as economic power' was essential.

In his moving address of confession, Sri Jayaprakash Narain affirmed :

> "Despair had seized our heart after the attainment of independence. We felt that the face of the society could not be altered through the technique of non-violence for the priests of *Ahimsa* though in power, had no plan, no programme, to change the society. *Ahimsa* was given only one meaning—we must not resort to *Himsa* or violence. But Vinobaji dispelled our illusions. As the light of Bhoodan Yagna spread out the clouds of doubts and darkness disappeared. Today everybody has accepted that land is the mother of one and all and each has equal right upon it. One who labours to produce from land had the first right. This is the intellectual revolution that has taken place within the last two years. Now the task before all of us is to give this revolution a practical shape, make it a reality and accomplish this mission.

* See text in Appendix B.

He added :

" I believe that Bhoodan Yagna is the herald of the total revolution likely to come in India—economic, social and political revolution. This Yagna is the foundation-stone of the new society. Hence with all our strength let us take to it. Political party-workers have a vanity of their own. They think that they can do a lot. I share this vanity. But I want to tell all of them that they should abandon all activities for at least one year and devote themselves to Bhoodan Yagna or they should unburden themselves of other responsibilities and do this work. "

Vinoba's opening speech at the Chandil Sammelan was, as it were, an inspired address in which he threw vivid light on the spirit behind his mission. This address must be regarded as a permanent contribution to the domain of thought. He said that we had to work for creating a society which could function without any military force. He urged upon the constructive workers to build up what he called, in his inimitable language स्वतंत्र जनशक्ति, or the self-reliant power of the people, which should be distinguished from the other two forms of power—the power of violence (हिंसा शक्ति) and the power of the State (दण्ड शक्ति).

He said :

" We do not aim at doing acts of kindness but at creating a kingdom of kindness. Kindness can and does exist even in the kingdom of wickedness, but only as a pinch of salt does in food,—kind acts only add to the taste of that with which they are mixed. Such kindness brings a sort of flavour to the violence of war, it cannot end war.... We must, therefore, develop a larger view and desist from undertaking any activity merely because it appears to be a constructive act of service."

Vinoba continued :

" I, therefore, want to devote myself to the creation of *Jana-shakti*, the forging for the sanction of the

enlightened masses,—a power which is opposed to the force of violence and different from the authority of the State."

How to move on towards this objective? Vinoba answered:

"Our work should proceed on the basis of—one, *Vichar-shasan* ( विचार शासन ) or peaceful conversion of people to our view by making them think about it, and two, *Kartritva-vibhajan*, ( कर्तृत्व विभाजन ) or distribution of work among the individuals without creating an administrative authority.

"*Vichar-shasan* means the readiness on our part to understand the other person's point of view and to explain ours to him. In no case shall we seek to impose our view on any one. We will rather insist that they accept it only after they are convinced of its correctness....

"The other instrument of our work is *Kartritva-vibhajan*, or the distribution of work among individuals. There should be no concentration of the power to act and execute at any one centre.... Freedom from dependence or armed might can come only by following the policy which God has adopted in regard to creation .... Indeed He has so far removed himself from the scene that some of us are led even to doubt His presence. In the same way we should strive to create a State whose very existence may be in doubt because it will not need to exercise its authority. Then only will we be said to have a non-violent State. So with this end in view we make the demand for investing the villages with the power to manage their affairs so as to convert them into village republics .... "

To achieve this objective, Vinoba placed the four-fold programme : (i) Integration of constructive work institutions into one homogenous units, (ii) collection of five crore acres

of land in Bhoodan Yagna by 1957; (iii) Sampattidan Yagna; and (iv) Yarn offering.

In another speech on the same occasion, Vinoba observed that western democracy, relying as it does on the principle of co-operative opposition, which was being practised in our country also, gave rise to certain evils which we should try to eradicate. He dwelt upon the necessity of directing our efforts towards enlightening the people and finding out a programme acceptable to all men of good-will and honesty. To quote him :

> " I hold the view that a thing on which the good differ among themselves is not worthy of implementation. Only such programmes should be placed before the people on which the good are in agreement........Differences in view there will always be, but in the field of action we must aim at unity. "

Also he gave the stirring call :

> " I want that for a year from now you should give all your time and energy to this thing (Bhoodan Yagna), each in his province. And this you should do in the spirit of dedication, leaving everything else—even good things. I am not telling you anything new. It is a recognized precept in *Bhakti marg* (भक्तिमार्ग), the way of devotion, that it demands total dedication. And our way is a way of devotion, for we seek to introduce love and harmony into the society, which cannot be done except through devotion. We want to generate love. When this becomes our chief duty we should be prepared to abandon all other smaller duties. "

## CHAPTER X

# ON 'DO OR DIE' MISSION

The Chandil session of the Sarvodaya Samaj contributed to a clarity of thought and brought into prominence the far-reaching implications of the Bhoodan Yagna movement. Also the deliberations there made it clear to constructive workers that ' what they were required ', as Vinoba wrote to a correspondent, ' was to wind up as many of their present activities as possible and plunge themselves in the Bhoodan work '. This work was not merely one more addition to their various activities but ' something which comprehended all of them and which was, therefore, entitled to claim their sole attention. ' The Sammelan gave a new inspiration to the workers who spread out in their respective areas. And Vinoba restarted on his Bihar trek on 12th March, 1953—after a little less than three months' fateful stay at Chandil.

Spending about a week in Manbhum district, Vinoba entered Hazaribagh district on 25th March. At Giridih, in this district, the Raja of Dhanbad donated a lakh and one acre of land, the largest single donation so far. On 13th April, Vinoba came to Gaya district for the second time. His first camp this time was at Rajauli. On May 3 and 4, Vinoba stayed in Gaya town. The Bihar State Congress Committee met on May 3 and passed a resolution asking its subordinate committees and workers to collect 32 lakh acres of land, as demanded by Vinobaji, to solve Bihar's land problem. The resolution also called upon all those districts which had not fulfilled their initial quota ( out of the four lakh total ) to complete it by 31st August 1953.

Palamau district again. On 29th May, Vinoba was camping at Ranka near Daltanganj. The Raja of Ranka spent considerable time with Vinoba. When the latter came to know that the former had donated 2,500 acres and 11,000

acres respectively to two workers, Vinoba inquired of the Raja, " Why this difference ? "

" I gave as much as I was asked for," came the quick reply.

" Then how much are you going to give me ? "

" As much as you ask for. "

" What is the total land with you ? "

" A lakh acres of *parti* land and about nine or ten thousand acres of *khud-kasht*, out of which about three thousand acres have been already allotted to the ryots. "

"You have thrown upon me the responsibility to look after your interests as well. I generally demand one-sixth. Hence you please give me the whole of your *parti* land and one-sixth from the *khud-kasht*."

"Agreed," the Raja promptly put in.

Thus the Raja of Ranka donated one lakh, two thousand and one acres of his land. It happened to be the *Buddha-Jayanti* day. In his post-prayer address, Vinoba referred to the above incident, termed the said dan as *Poorna Dan* ( complete gift ), and dedicated it to Lord Buddha.

About a fortnight after, Vinoba entered Ranchi district for the second time. On 14th June at Netarhat, one of the highest spots in Bihar, the Raja of Palkot, convenor of the Ranchi District Bhoodan Committee, presented him with *Dan patras* amounting to 45,132 acres, including the Raja's own donation of 44,500 acres which consisted of, as in the case of Raja Ranka, his total *parti* land and one-sixth of *khud-kasht*. On June 15th, Vinoba received 632 acres from no less than 1,401 donors, almost all of whom attended the prayer meeting. He called this gift as a *Vishnu-Sahasra-nam-patha* (विष्णु सहस्र नाम पाठ, a recitation of a thousand names of God )—first ever to take place in Bhoodan annals. Addressing them in a clear and simple language, Vinoba said :

"I want to spread kindness, love and equality. It is easy to follow kindness and love. But equality may take some time. Hence today I demand only a part of the land one owns. But the *Vedas* say that we should all live like brothers, as equal brothers, with no elder or younger. But I hold that in this transition period elder and younger brothers would be there. We should know that all of us are made of the same five elements and the same light pervades us all. We come naked. And when we go we all become one with the earth. Then why this disparity and classes ?"

On 16th June, Vinoba made a new departure in his routine. After reaching his camp at Bishnupur, he called for some spades and went forward, with his companions and some villagers, to break the dry land about half a mile away. He dug for 17 minutes. Day after day he raised it by one minute. It was only during the heavy rains that this programme had to be abandoned.

For three days, from July 2 to 4, a camp of Bhoodan workers from 15 districts of Bihar was held at Ranchi where Vinoba stayed for one full week till July 7th. There Vinoba asked the workers to go into the deep interior and put forth his demand for eight lakhs of *Dan patras*, together with 32 lakh acres of good land. The number of Bihar *Dan patras* by the end of June amounted to about 47,000, out of which more than a third came from Gaya district alone. Next were Palamau and Ranchi, with about ten and eight thousand acres respectively. Thus the remaining 14 districts had contributed not more than twelve thousand *Dan patras*. Vinoba urged upon the workers to awake and speed up their work.

Hazaribagh again. The Raja of Ramgarh accompanied Vinoba throughout his sojourn in the district. When Vinoba reached Padma, the headquarters of the Raja, he was presented with about two lakh acres of land coming from the members of the Raja's family and some others as well. The Raja also participated in Vinoba's physical labour or *Shramdan*

*Yagna* ( bodily–labour gift ) programme. When Vinoba saw the Raja and others digging land, he said :

> " Today the white–clothed gladly took part in the earth digging programme. This means that times are changing. Now none is likely to have very white clothes. Our God is known as *Krishna*. *Krishna* means black or cultivator. The one who carries on cultivation in India is necessarily black. We worship the black colour of *Krishna*. Now is coming an age when all will work and will regard it a sin to eat without work. "

As they were all busy at *Shramdan–Yagna*, members of Vinoba's party sang the popular song :

> " *Bhai kudali chalate chalo,*
> *Mitti ka sona Banate chalo.*"

( On, go on with the spade and turn the soil into gold )

When Vinoba was at Hazaribagh on 18th July, he met Shri Ram Chandra Sharma 'Veer' who was on his 62nd day of fast in connection with cow protection. On Vinoba's persuasion he terminated his fast. In his post–prayer meeting, Vinoba, referring to the same, remarked :

> "The Bhoodan work which we are doing includes cow protection also. But I prefer to concentrate on the root—on the most fundamental thing—so that all others may improve automatically. The Bhoodan aims at revolutionizing the entire society; and this will naturally bring about the protection of the cows. People from other countries may ask us why we should specially choose the cow for protection, why not protect other animals also ? To this, I would say we have no desire to take the place of God who alone can provide protection to all the living beings. We have set a limit to our efforts consistent with our capacity. We make use of the services of the cows and bullocks and therefore we have accepted the responsibility to protect them. I do not like the

'Bhai, Kudali chalate chalo'

present craze for tractors being introduced in our agriculture. The use of tractors goes against the protection of the cow. We may use tractors for bringing under cultivation lands lying fallow but its use in normal agriculture will be in its effect as disastrous as the deliberate killing of the cows."

By the end of July 1953, land collection in Hazaribagh district amounted to 7,01,497.75 acres obtained from 5091 donors, the highest in any district so far. The table below gives the figures for the various districts of Bihar upto 31st July, 1953 :

TABLE IX

| No. | District | No. of Donors | Land (Acres) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Shahabad | 1,012 | 4,169.20 |
| 2 | Patna | 419 | 693.90 |
| 3 | Saharsa | 1,964 | 2,269.84 |
| 4 | Purnia | 2,882 | 15,155.11 |
| 5 | Monghyr | 38 | 348.54 |
| 6 | Champaran | 527 | 853.71 |
| 7 | Saran | 193 | 350.76 |
| 8 | Palamau | 10,593 | 1,48,090.96 |
| 9 | Gaya | 17,218 | 63,725.79 |
| 10 | Ranchi | 8,515 | 95,679.61 |
| 11 | Singhbhum | 296 | 13,345.63 |
| 12 | Darbhanga | 216 | 101.30 |
| 13 | Bhagalpur | 65 | 370.31 |
| 14 | Manbhum | 310 | 17,434.71 |
| 15 | Muzaffarpur | 29 | 71.05 |
| 16 | Hazaribagh | 5,091 | 7,01,497.75 |
| Total upto 31st July, 1953 | | 49,368 | 10,64,158.17 |

Leaving Hazaribagh, Vinoba entered Gaya district for the third time on 29th July 1953. He was at Bodh-Gaya on 2nd August and at Gaya town on the following two days. At Bodh-Gaya, Vinoba tackled the problem of some peasants

who had been evicted by the landlord. Vinoba prevailed upon the latter to donate the land cultivated by the evicted peasants for redistribution to them again. In this connection it may be added that ever since Vinoba came to know of land evictions (while he was in U. P.), he has been advising the tenants to cling to their bit of land and refuse to be evicted—an advice which he is constantly giving—and he also asked the state Government to check and stop this calamity. It is hoped that a proper, courteous and dignified approach by the Bhoodan worker ( or anybody else for that matter ) would prove fruitful in restoring the land to the poor evicted. Working on the same lines, Sri Govind Rao, a Bhoodan worker in Gaya district, succeeded in acquiring land from the landlord and restoring it to the original tiller-cum-owner who had been evicted. Thus the Bhoodan movement seeks to meet the problem of land eviction by enlightening the heart of the landlord to read the signs of the times and act according to the time-spirit in a manner immune from bitterness.

At Gaya town, members of the Bhoodan Sahayak Samiti (Aid-to-Bhoodan Committee), sponsored by big zamindars, met Vinoba and assured him that they would try to fulfill the quota of 32 lakhs of acres by calling upon fellow zamindars to part with their land. They also requested him to sit down at one place and suspend his 'quick march' at least for the duration of the rains. Vinoba expressed his grateful thanks for their offer to work in the movement but pleaded helplessness to accept their second suggestion. He said that he had resolved to continue his programme during the rains as well.

On 9th August, 1953, Vinoba was at Hulasganj in Gaya district. Recalling this historic day, in his evening discourse, he pointed out that the *Mantra* (call) for *Swaraj- Yagna* first uttered by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906, inspired us to the *sadhana* (devotion) which culminated in the *Quit India* decision that brought us freedom. As one seed destroys itself to produce another, so also the *mantra* of *Swaraj* gave rise to another *mantra*, *viz.*, *Sarvodaya* (good and uplift of all). A

fundamental feature of *Sarvodaya* was the land problem which must needs be solved. Appealing to his audience to donate land, he said :

> "Forsake your narrow vision. Have a broad outlook, take a long range view. Mine is not to break land into pieces but to unite hearts that have gone asunder. We are sewing clothes. And we are cutting in order to unite. If you were to ask a tailor why he cut cloth, he would reply, "This is a rugged piece. I am cutting it to sew a new one out of it."
>
> "All this land of ours has gone tattered. It has been reduced to pieces. This earth has been fragmented into bits. So we shall provide land to the poor and even if we may be required to break it, we shall make the country *ek-ras* ( एकरस or uniform)."

For about ten days from August 10 to 20, Vinoba went round Patna district and on 21st, entered Monghyr. The rainy season was at its height. But Vinoba hailed it, " These are not rain drops, but God's compassion over us, His blessings !" On September 3 and 4, he was at Khadigram, a colony founded by Sri Dhirendra Mazumdar under the auspices of Sarv Seva Sangh. A band of youthful enthusiasts is working there under Dhirendrabhai's guidance and exploring the possibilities of decentralised self-sufficient economy. A meeting of Sarv Seva Sangh was held at Khadigram on these two days. Conveners of Bhoodan Committees of various provinces were also there to review the progress of work done since the Chandil Sammelan. It was a miniature Bhoodan Conference. Vinoba, congratulating them, on the work they had done, told them that since they had been able to achieve that much with so little effort ( total collections amounted to 20,66,808 acres ), they could do a lot if only they concentrated with greater zeal and determination and could thus secure the target of five crore acres easily. He also gave a warning to institutions not to rely on money or funds any more but progressively resort to *Shram-shakti* (labour strength).

On 14th September, 1953, just a year after he entered

Bihar, Vinoba was at Kiajori in Monghyr district. In his post-prayer speech that day, he observed that the present age was of *Sakhya-Bhakti* ( सख्यभक्ति or comradely love). To quote him:

"The days of kings are past; and so are those of the zamindars. The present age has no use either for the kings or the zamindars. The world to be belongs to the people whose voice will henceforth be supreme. The rise of the people in the affairs of the world signifies that the present age demands equality—equality as between friends. The relationship among different individuals constituting the society must be based on comradely love.... Not service, but comradeship is its ideal. It does not mean that those who deserve respect will not receive it. Excellence will certainly receive due respect, but the relationship between individuals will be that of comradely equality."

He continued:

"We have to build our society in accordance wih the demand of the age. We must realise that old values cannot continue in their old forms. The values and norms which obtained when Tulsidas wrote his *Ramayana* cannot be accepted today. In those days a *Brahmana* was considered inherently superior but today he cannot claim that superiority as a right. We will now respect virtues wherever we may find them, but the relationship in every case will be based on equality...

"Those who refuse to keep pace with the changing times get not only defeated, but also suffer for it. No matter how big according to past standards an individual might be, in the changing times in which we are living, his old habits and manners smacking of a superior air will not be tolerated."

Giving a call to the workers, Vinoba concluded:

"Looking at Bhoodan from this point of view, you

will see that it is just an expression of the demand of the age. Had it been otherwise, we could not have received land from small land-owners, and the bigger ones, in many cases, would have turned us out of their presence peremptorily. Besides, we would have had to owe a debt of enormous gratitude to every individual donor. But we just go to everyone without any hesitation and tell him quite frankly that he is not the owner of the land. We even insist that there must be as many gift-deeds as there are land-owners. If you set out to awaken the sense of *Dharma*, *i. e.*, ethical duty in the people for giving effect to what you have realized to be the demand of the age, then your words must prove irresistible, people will have to listen to you and do as you bid. *Bhoodan represents just this demand of the age.* It is not my invention. I want the workers to carry this message to the people and not merely collect land. Let them explain to the people that this is the age of comradely love and I am sure they will succeed in their mission."

Leaving Monghyr district in the early morning of 15th, Vinoba entered Santhal Pargana district. Three days later, he was at Deoghar where stands the famous *Baidyanathdham* temple. On account of the Bihar Bhoodan workers' meeting he stayed there for two days, 18th and 19th. In the evening of the 18th, he was requested by the head *panda* of the temple to pay a visit to the holy shrine. When he was told that Vinoba could enter a temple only if Harijans were also allowed to have the *darshan*, he gave his consent to Harijans accompanying Vinoba. Accordingly, on the evening of the 19th, Vinoba, together with some Harijans and his colleagues, went into the temple. But hardly had he gone a few steps, *pandas* of the temple fell upon Vinoba and party with *lathis* amidst cries of "*Dharma Ki Jai ho; Adharma Ka Nash ho!* (Long live religion! Down with ir-religion!)" Members of his party, specially Sri Ram Deo Thakur, Bihar's veteran khadi worker and who has been Vinoba's constant companion in his Bihar sojourn, surrounded

him, but Vinoba was slightly injured at the ear. Calmly and quietly he came out, some members of the party being seriously hurt and beaten. Next day when he reached Pardih in Bhagalpur district, Vinoba issued a statement to the press as follows :

> "Yesterday, while at *Baidyanathdham*, I went for the *darshan* of *Mahadevjee* in company with Harijans and some of my colleagues. We could not, of course, have *Mahadevjee's darshan* but as a blessing got beatings at the hands of His devotees. That has evoked inquiries from friends and hence this statement.
>
> "I would like to say at the very outset that those who have indulged in this act of assault did so only out of ignorance. That being so, I do not want them to be punished for this. Rather I am glad to find that all those who were with me in hundreds, remained calm throughout. Not only this, my companions, who were badly battered, told me that there was no anger within them even at the time of occurrence. I feel it is symbolic of God's grace to a land, to have workers that bear no ill-will against anybody. Those who indulged in the assault were seized with anger, so much so that they made no distinction between man and woman. I trust this will prove to be the last curse of *Bhedasar*, *i.e.*, the devil in man that discriminates between one man and another.
>
> "I had no mind either to force my way into the temple or to seek entry into it on the strength of the provisions of law. On the contrary it has been my practice not to go to a temple that is not open to Harijans. But I was told, on inquiry, that Harijans had free ingress into this temple. Consequently, we went out for *darshan* in a reverent mood after the evening prayers. We had observed silence all along the way, and I had been meditating on the vedic

hymn sung in the praise of *Mahadev*. When we were assaulted, unexpectedly in this state, I even experienced significant sense of comfort. I turned back with a feeling of happiness but as we were going away, the persons assaulting us became more pronounced in their zeal. Those in my company formed a cordon round me and took all the blows that were directly aimed at me. Yet I had also a taste of it, as if to mark the concluding part of a sacrificial performance. I recalled to my mind how the Master was also subjected to a similar assault at this very place of pilgrimage. I felt honoured to have been similarly blessed.

"I have already said that I do not want anybody to be punished. But the constitution of free India has been clearly violated. Small retributive measures cannot make up for that violation. What is needed is to provide against any recurrence of such incidents in future. I am of opinion that it would not be wrong if Government decide to take over such places of worship. And perhaps that would make for better management. This is no suggestion of mine. I am only doing a sort of loud thinking.

"This is an age of science. Every faith is being tested on the touchstone of reason. If our society keeps this in view and behaves accordingly, everything will go on well."

The unbecoming act of the *pandas* was condemned all over the country. But it was a blessing in disguise. It awakened the country to the issue of Harijan-entry into our temples and showed that the malady had crept far deeper than suspected. The happiest consequence of it has been to set people athinking about it and not to let this disease linger on in our country any more.

On October 6, Vinoba was at Bhagalpur, an important city of Bihar. The attendance at the evening prayer that day

was more than 30,000 strong. Addressing the citizens facing him, Vinoba went into the depth of the idea behind Bhoodan Yagna and said :

> " When western science reacted upon India's spiritual culture it produced a new ideology which we may call 'collective non-violence'. It was a result of the fusion of science of the West and the ethics (*Adhyatma*) of India. And it was through *Ahimsa* that we secured freedom. Now it is the turn of the East to carry the ideology of *Collective Ahimsa* to the West. "

He added that the success of Bhoodan Yagna showed the efficacy of 'collective non-violence' in the economic sphere too. He regarded it all as a doing of God who had chosen us all as His instruments for the same. Thereafter he reiterated his grim resolve :

> "I have taken a pledge not to leave Bihar without solving its land problem. I shall either fulfill my task here or die".

From Bhagalpur district to Monghyr and then again to Bhagalpur. Crossing the Kosi on 19th November, Vinoba stepped into Purnea district at Kursela where Sri Baidyanath Chowdhury presented him *Dan patras* of about 30, 000 acres of land. The Maharajadhiraja of Darbhanga also met Vinoba at Kursela and made a handsome donation of 1,18,800 acres.* . He promised both to donate more land in future and to persuade the landlords to contribute their share in the Yagna.

* Details of the said gift are as follows:

(i) 95,000 acres—uncultivated land ( vested in the Government under the Bihar Land Reforms Act ) of which the Maharajadhiraja has donated his compensation; under the provisions of the proposed Bihar Bhoodan Bill, this land will pass to the Bihar Bhoodan Committee for distribution.

(ii) 23,000 acres—land obtained by sale in execution of rent decree.

(iii) 800 acres—land under cultivation, *khud-kash* .

For some time past Vinoba was stressing in his speeches the need of organising landless labourers. He dwelt upon this point in greater detail at Kursela where he asked the rich to donate as much as they could and the ordinary cultivator to donate one-sixth, bade the Bhoodan worker to be more earnest and self-sacrificing in his work and do *Tap* (Penance), and called upon the landless poor to stand up and come into their own. He said that he had been in Bihar pretty long and his demand had not been met. Of course one year and a quarter is not a very long period to realise 32 lakhs of acres of land. But, remarked Vinoba, the mother, howsoever busy, runs to the child the moment it weeps. So also let the cry of the landless labour be conveyed to the door of the landowners and they would throw it open. He suggested that this organisation be carried out on three lines: (i) unity among the landless so that they may rise like one man and not fall a prey to the temptations or threats of the landholders, (ii) their determination to take to neat and healthy habits and abstain from smoking, drinking, gambling, etc., and (iii) peacefully approaching the landlords to call for justice.

Addressing a workers' meeting on November 29th at Purnea, the district headquarters, Vinoba said:

> "It would be wrong for a worker to entertain any doubt about the bonafides of those to whom he goes for collecting the donations. The local people may have an adverse opinion about some of them arising from their past experience. But the worker would not allow it to influence his judgement. Again, he would not think ill, much less talk disparagingly, of those who refuse to listen to his pleadings. He would consider such refusal just an opportunity presented to him by the person concerned to continue his efforts in the cause which he has accepted as his own. Talking ill is useless, even worse than useless because it lowers the atmosphere and harms our work. It has no power, in any case, not the power which can be of help to us. The worker should, therefore, take care not to utter anything ill. If, of course, he finds some-

thing wrong being done, he may express his views in measured terms, though quiet clearly. But no condemnation or violent denunciation. He must be firm in his faith that every man is good at heart and what he has to do is to bring out this goodness into the open. Besides, the times are with us and may be relied upon to exert the needed moral pressure to bring about the desired result. Thus we should go to the people with the full faith in the justice of our mission and perfect trust in the goodness of the donor concerned. We will not go like beggars demeaning ourselves, for we take *dan* to mean equal sharing of wealth among the society. Nor shall we go like superiors ordering them to comply with what we say and humiliating those who do not. No, we will go as a brother to a brother, or a son to a father and ask them—our sense of love appealing to their sense of love—to part with a due share in favour of the *Daridranarayan.*"

Total donations in Purnea district by the time of Vinoba's entry into the next, district Saharsa, amounted to 44,500 acres. Saharsa is a typical district of Bihar. Even the district headquarters cannot stand comparison against a sub-divisional town of Uttar Pradesh. Ravaged by the Kosi, it is inhabited by some of the poorest and most resourceless men and women of our country. Though not much Bhoodan work has been done in this district yet the audience at Vinoba's meetings was always large. Speaking at Kishangunj on December 9th, Vinoba observed :

"The proverty and suffering which we see around are man made and man can abolish them. But the remedies which touch only the surface will not do for this purpose. We will have to change the entire structure of the society.

"Changing the social structure does not mean doing something which is against human nature. No, in fact what we seek to do is nothing but to follow the dictates of our human nature, our real nature

which constitutes our humanity. It should therefore prove to be very easy,—as easy as to swim with the current of the river, because we will only be following our own higher nature, we will be doing the will of God who is the ruler of the world. What can be easier than that ?"

Entering Saharsa district at Murliganj on 7th December, Vinoba left the district at Manoharpatti on 21st December and then stepped into northern part of Darbhanga district. His first camp in the district was at Hulaspatti. On 25th he was at Madhubani, Bihar's most important Khadi producing centre. The gatherings, both in Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur districts, surpassed those in all districts so far. Roughly, not less than twenty thousand attended the evening prayer meeting each day in these districts where Vinoba stayed until 9th January. At Madhubani, he asked the people to stand on their own feet, cast off indulgence and indolence and grow virtuous and industrious. He urged upon them to take to Khadi which included latent donation ( गुप्तदान *Gupta Dan* ) also. There was, he said, no need to offer charity etc. in the name of superstition, miscalled religion. Real *Dharma* lay in serving God as embodied in the *Daridranarayan*. He assured them that if they took to Khadi they would be doing the highest worship in the shrine of God and no power could then take them to hell. Bhoodan and Khadi or village industries went together. He appealed to the people to donate cheerfully. At one place in Darbhanga district, Vinoba put forth his demand for no less than three lakhs of *Dan patras* from their district. As the population of Darbhanga is about 36 lakhs, largest of all the districts in the country, it comes to about six lakh families of whom only little more than three lakhs would be land-owning ones. Thus Vinoba's new demand amounted to one *Dan patra* from each and every home in the district. Addressing a vast concourse of humanity, including women as well, at Singhwalla ( Darbhanga ), December 30, Vinoba said :

"For the last fifteen months I have been going round Bihar. I tell you, brothers and sisters,

why do you not take up this work ? Offer your donation and jump into the service field. Society will then acknowledge your leadership. Today the rich are much ill-talked of. Possibly, people bow down before them when face to face. But that too would cease to happen in future. Hence if you offer yourself for people's service you will command both love and respect. Can there be a cheaper bargain for revolution ? That is why I ask the owners to discard ownership and stand shoulder to shoulder with all else. Ramchandra did the same with foolish monkeys. Tulsidas says that Ram sat below the tree on the ground while the monkeys on the branches overhead; even so ignorant monkeys were hugged by God who made them one with Him. So also I urged upon the masters or lords to cast away this lordliness or ownership and be one with the rest. Is it not more pleasant to stand on one's own feet than to stand on those of others ? These owners or masters are verily servants of their servants. They will drink water only when the servant gives it, take bath only when the servant calls for it and thus they are a slave in his hands. We have to wipe out the disparity between man and woman. So also that between castes. Next we have to bring about economic equality and do away with the master–servant disparity."

From 31st December, 1953 to 9th January, 1954 Vinoba was in Muzaffarpur district and taking a boat at Hajipur on 10th January, he crossed both Gundak and Ganga to reach Patna at 8 a. m. He spent three extremely busy days at Patna. The prayer meeting attendance on all three days was tremendous, being the highest on the first day. Addressing the Patna citizens, Vinoba observed :

" Land problem would be solved in one way or the other all over the world. Hence I do not worry about how much land I get. My only concern is the depth to which the right thought finds place in the heart of the people.

"Five or six months ago your Prime Minister said that the relations between India and Pakistan were improving. But now he himself tells us that the scene is changing. What does it mean ? Simply this—things are not following man's intellect but the God of creation is doing His own. As an earthquake is a result of creation-strength so also these great wars, world wars, are a consequence of creation-strength. They do not obey man's mind. Where the mind fails, they occur and man turns into a tool as also cannon-fodder. But the wheel of creation rolls on.

"It is for science to give speed. But science cannot give direction. That is the domain of आत्मज्ञान (spiritual knowledge). विज्ञान gives speed while आत्मज्ञान gives direction. In a motor car there are different mechanisms for speed and direction. So also in a boat. I trust that wherever ज्ञान is coming in contact with विज्ञान, good results would follow, man would take to the right track and a right sociology come into being."

Pleading for the need of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, Vinoba remarked :

"Today the vital task is to make every village as strong as a fort. Presently a large number of foreign goods, boycotted during the swadeshi period, are freely coming in. Nay, we are importing second-hand clothes from America. People amongst us purchase them because they find them cheap. We seem to have lost all idea of the dignity of the nation. Reducing ourselves into beggars like this, we will never be able to build the country. *Swaraj* has not yet reached the village. I explain to the villagers to rise up and take a vow that we shall turn into finished goods all the raw material that we have in our village and never accept those things from the cities. As a Hindu abstains from beef though cheap and a Musalman from pork though cheap, so also the

village should not touch that city made article which can be prepared there itself."

He concluded saying :

"Through Bhoodan I want to bring about equality in the political, economic and social spheres. I want that every village must have its own arrangement of education, industries and crafts, land distribution, defence, marketing and every village should have a *Mandal* to decide about the things to be sold or purchased from without. This is what I call *Sarvodaya.* This is also the foundation of *Samya-Yogi Samaj.*"

On 11th and 12th, Vinoba explained the meaning and significance of the five kinds of *dans* he expected from the people—*Prem dan* (love gift), *Buddhi dan* (wisdom gift), *Shram dan* (labour gift), *Sampatti dan* and *Bhoodan.* He went into details of *Sampattidan Yagna* idea on 12th and appealed to the Patna people to come forward with their share in this Yagna.

At Patna Vinoba also addressed, on 10th January, a zamindars' meeting in which he was presented with five lakh acres. Accepting the gift, he pointed out that though the zamindars had given him a lot he was not satisfied and that he proposed to go to Gaya shortly with a resolve not to leave that district without fulfilling its quota of three lakhs. He called upon the zamindars to read the signs of the times and part quickly with what they had. He also remarked that they would face their real trial in the Sampattidan Yagna ordeal. He appealed to them to take to a life of service and sacrifice.

On 11th, he met the Bhoodan organisers of Bihar districts. He regretted that they were not realising the seriousness of the situation. Sri Laxmi Narain, convener of Bihar Bhoodan Committee and Bihar's well known and indefatigable constructive worker, also requested those present to brook no delay and take to their work with all vigour and zeal. On 12th, Vinoba

addressed members of the Bihar State Congress Committee which had recently elected Sri Srikrishna Sinha, Bihar's Chief Minister, as its new president. Vinoba, in the course of his morning walk on the 12th, called upon Sri Babu at his home. In the Congress Committee meeting he expressed the hope that if the Congress took to Bhoodan Yagna work it would get purified and strong and survive all shocks and attacks. He claimed to have a triple right on Sri Babu, as Bihar's Chief Minister, as Bihar's Congress Chief and as Sri Babu as an old member of the Gandhi family, and had every hope that under his guidance the Congress would leave no stone unturned in making Bhoodan a success and solving the land problem of Bihar. He also addressed a women's meeting, a students'meeting as also a youths' meeting. It may be added here that in the districts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur and in Patna city, there was a huge sale of Vinoba's *Gita Pravachan*. At one halt it exceeded eight hundred. As a token of love, Vinoba gives his autograph on *Gita Pravachan*.

Some correspondents from America also interviewed Vinoba at Patna. During their course of discussion, they asked him, "How far do you approve of science and technology?" Vinoba replied :

> "Science is a power for good and power for evil. But there must be some standards of morality in using that power. Science and violence go ill together as they will destroy society. Scientists, therefore, should have courage to come out and refuse to sell their intellects. They must get together and tell their Governments that they will not sell themselves to be utilized for destructive purposes ! I don't want to check the progress of science."

Spending more than a fortnight, from January 13 to January 29th, in Patna district, Vinoba entered Gaya district for the fourth time on 30th January, 1954, sixth death-anniversary of the Father of the Nation. He encamped at Kinjar. On reaching the place, in a solemn voice he uttered the following words :

"Today I am entering Gaya district again. Those who had come to receive me wanted to present me some garlands. I presented those garlands to them instead, which means that those people took up the banner of revolution and promised that either they would "do" this work or as Bapu asked, "die".

"Today is Bapu's anniversary. He taught us the maxim "do or die", and passed away after leading a life according to the same. He was serving humanity up to his last moment. There was not an iota of self-interest or greed in his work. With a burning faith in God and prayer and with Ramnam on his lips he was proceeding to the prayer-ground. Without even sitting down he went away."

With deep emotion and pathos he added :

"Six years have since passed. Now all those who take his name, all those who received his love bounteously, all of us like me are on trial.

"I cannot add much. There are such things as cannot be given vent to in words. I shall only say this much that this is my fourth entry into Gaya district. In the name of God I have taken a pledge. The pledge is that I would not go out of this district until the Bhoodan collection work of Gaya is complete. It is a very serious matter. The whole of India is looking towards Gaya. All those who are sympathetically inclined to our views have now cast their eyes towards this district. I want our workers to feel this responsibility. They may belong to one party or the other or to none. But if they devote themselves it is not more than a month's task. I do not worry my mind about the length of the period in which this task would be fulfilled. Humorously I remarked today, it was just a feeling, that in case I breathed my last while doing this work here, there was no harm. Rather Gaya is a place of *Shraddha* (श्राद्ध) whence others would have every facility. For me the place of *Shraddha* is only that where the pledge is

'Discard ownership and stand shoulder to shoulder with all else.'

realised. I refuse to believe that this place enjoys any particular sanctity which others do not. Yet the sentiment is there, for we are all Indians. But there is no question of peace or no peace in my heart. I enjoy peace on all fronts. This work of mine may succeed or I may go— I have peace in both and I am prepared for both.

" I say that everybody has to suffer in this Yagna because it is *Yagna.* We are not to consume *ghi* in Yagna. In fact, we must consume our self-interest or attachment, lust and greed. Hence in this Yagna also you must consume attachment, lust and greed. This is why everybody has to offer.

"Mine is this message of love. Today is a very sacred day. The *Ekadashi* (eleventh day) moon is there in the sky. I speak with that as witness. I desire that there should be none so unfortunate in this village as not to contribute one-sixth of his share."

Thus, as these lines go to the press, Vinoba has given himself up to the great ordeal. The whole country is watching the progress in Gaya with eager and expectant eyes. The ever-flowing tide of time would cover all this and the work now being carried on in Gaya would become an object of legend, history and song. At this solemn moment, Gita's last couplet recollects to one's mind again and again. It says :

" Wherever there is Krishna, the lord of Yoga, and Partha ( Arjuna ) , the archer, I think, there will surely be fortune, victory, welfare and morality."
( S. Radhakrishnan )

Gandhiji once interpreted it as follows :

"I have faith in the righteousness of our cause and the purity of our weapons. Where the means are clean there God undoubtedly is present with His blessings and where the two combine, defeat is an impossibility there."

Accordingly, the righteousness of our present cause as represented by Vinoba — transforming the society, alleviating the woes of the poor and cleansing our hearts — cannot be denied. And the means to attain it, the Bhoodan Yagna — as also the allied Yagnas — is as clean a weapon as possible. With these two there, what cannot be achieved none can say. The future becomes but an open chapter. Yet the future has to be lived before it is written about. May we of young India live it as desired !

CHAPTER XI

# THE NEW AWAKENING

Of all activities and programmes going on in our country today there is perhaps but one—that of Bhoodan Yagna-which has attracted the attention of all groups and parties in the country. Practically, there is now no opposition to it worth the name. There was a time indeed when it was criticised severely and positively. But that only helped to clarify its implications and provided food for thought to all concerned. With the pace of the movement, the criticism has gradually subsided. What is far more important, however, is the new enthusiasm the movement has created as also the energetic forces it has released. Persons belonging to various shades of life and subscribing to different political ideologies are participating in it. One of its no less considerable achievement is the great opportunity it has provided for our womenfolk to come out and play their part in the building up of India of the morrow.

The women workers have not only boldly stepped out into the open but have also evoked a response which others may well envy. Of these, special mention may, however, be made of Jankidevi Bajaj and Vimala Thakar, Rameshwari Nehru and Satya Bala (Punjab), Sushila Agrawal and Sarla Behn (an English devotee settled in Almora, U. P.), Prabhavati Devi (Bihar), Ashadevi Aryanayakam (Bengal), Amalprabha Dutta (Assam), Shanta Narulkar, Kusum and Nirmala Deshpande, Mira and Mridula Mundada (Madhya Pradesh), Maltidevi and Ramadevi Choudhuri (Orissa), Vidyabehn (Andhra), Karthiyaniammal (Tamilnad) and V. Rajamma (Kerala), to name only a few. They have done creditable work in their States. Some of them have also accompanied Vinoba on his tour as regular members of his staff. Besides, Vimala Behn has covered a large part of the country, going round for Bhoodan talks, lectures and workers' camps. Smt. Jankidevi

Bajaj took up a pledge on Vinoba's birthday, 11th September, 1953, to obtain 108 *Koop Duns* by Bapu's birthday, October 2, following. With unflinching zeal, she stuck to her pledge and carried it out. Also she obtained from the womenfolk gifts or jewels and ornaments, amounting to 80 tolas of gold.

An idea of the great influence these women workers are producing in the countryside can be formed from the following few instances.

A zamindar of a particular village was known to be very hard-hearted, cruel and lascivious. One summer afternoon a *Behn* (as these workers are addressed) knocked at his door. He was simply struck! Who dare come to his home! A female voice touched him to the quick all the more. But he did not open the door. That worker knocked again, "Brother, please open! Your sister has come to your door." Coming to the railings on the first floor of his house, he just peeped out to see who knocked below and irritatingly asked, "Who is there?" She turned back, looked upwards and said, "Your sister, please open!"

He came downstairs and opened the door. Before the *behn* could say anything, he remarked, "Don't you know I have a bad reputation in the locality?"

"What of that? I have only come to see my brother."

The zamindar was taken aback. No body had ever been so polite and considerate to him. He asked her to accompany him and gave her a seat in his luxurious drawing room. Next he enquired whether she would have some tea. The *behn* submitted, "First, kindly listen to what brings me here."

"As you please."

Then she related to him in brief the rise and growth of Vinoba's movement and urged upon him to do his duty towards God and the village people as also to himself. With a devoted attention he followed what she said. After she had finished, he put in, "I would donate as much as you ask me."

"Only one-sixth."

"Very well," said he with a feeling of joy. She filled in the *Dan patra* and obtained his signature. He insisted on her having some repast. She acceded to his request. When that was over, she told him, "I want you to do one thing more and I hope, you, as my brother, would agree to it."

"Just let me know what it is."

"I would like you to accompany me to other persons in the village to secure land gifts."

"I am afraid I will prove a liability to you."

"That is not what I feel. Only you come with me."

"I repeat that I would be a liability. But since you press me to do so I will do your bidding."

Shortly after when that zamindar and the *behn* went round the village, a thrill passed down the spine of anyone who saw them or heard of it. It was verily a miracle !

A *behn* addressed a Bhoodan meeting in a village inhabited mostly by petty traders and bankers. In the course of her speech, she pointed out :

"A *Dan* which is done for the sake of name and prestige is not *Satwik* (सात्विक or noble). Noble is only that *Dan* which does not generate pride in the donor and humbleness in the donnee."

Though it was a well attended meeting and they had listened to her with rapt attention, yet nobody came forward to donate. She returned to her camp with a sad face. She wondered why there was no response. Soon after there came an old man. "*Behnji*, I want to donate 39 bighas of my land."

"Baba, why did you not announce it in the meeting itself, rather than take the trouble of coming here ?"

"I wanted to avoid publicity," was the quiet answer.

This encouraged her and early next morning she reached a zamindar's house. A young man of that household said, "*Behnji*, we carefully followed what you said last night. We shall give one-sixth, but let us first consult all members of our family."

"Well, do begin something," countered she.

"Do give something to encourage our *behnji*," put in one of those present. "Let us give her some just now. For the rest we can think over."

Thus the series started and within a short time the woman worker obtained 312 bighas from that village where nobody could expect even one.

Here is another interesting instance. A woman-worker approached a rich landlord whom she asked to offer some donation with a large heart. He burst forth in rage, "Why ask with love? Why not cut off our head and then take away all?" She was dumbfounded. She gathered courage and said. "Please do not be angry. I have come here as a messenger of *Vinoba Baba*. I have full faith in *Baba's* words. *Baba* says that those who do not donate land today do so because they are going to donate it tomorrow. It is only a matter of time." So saying she marched past.

She came to a spot where about half a dozen persons were sitting round a fire. She explained to them what brought her there. Then one man offered one *bigha*. "May I please know how much land you have?" asked she.

"Why?"

"Because I want one-sixth of what is with you."

"Alright, you take three more *bighas*. I will give you four."

"You may give me as you choose. But I want to know how much you have."

"Sixty bighas."

"So you are giving me only four. I demand six more."

The man was bewildered and rubbed his head in amazement. The woman worker looked into his eyes disarmingly and remarked :

"Won't you give me my share ? Am I not your daughter ? Would you allow me go disconsolate ?"

There was silence for a while.

"If you give me full ten bighas, I hope to get accordingly at every door in the village," she sweetly argued.

It produced the desired effect. That man gave her ten bighas.

Beside women workers, some Rajas or landlords, as said earlier, have begun taking active part in the Bhoodan Yagna movement. Abandoning their pompous palaces, some of them have changed their way of life and taken to land collection for Bhoodan Yagna.

Again, this movement has infused new life into constructive workers all over the country. Quite a good number of them consist of young workers in the prime of their lives. They are found almost in every province. An account of the remarkable experiences of these workers occasionally appears in papers given to the Sarvodaya ideology or sometimes in others as well. Here follow some of them.

After a worker addressed a Bhoodan meeting, a woman got up and offered to give up in Bhoodan all the jewellery she had. His joy knew no bounds. But he could not easily believe his eyes. So he asked her, "Won't you get new ornaments made again?"

"It is only with the resolve never to do so that am handing over this bundle of misery to you. Today you have opened our eyes."

Everybody present in the meeting was astonished. Then followed other donations. In the village also lived a landlord–lawyer who was responsible for many land disputes in the area. He was ready to donate 20 out of his 430 bighas. The worker requested him to donate at least hundred acres more. After some discussion he agreed to one–sixth. But the worker insisted on 126 bighas, the amount required to resettle the evicted peasants. He did not seem to agree. His wife who was following the conversation, spoke out, "Ganga has come to our very door. Let us bathe in it. For the last four years you have been deeply worried on account of these land disputes. And not for once you thought of others. Why not give what this brother asks ? God will take care of us all."

The landlord sat dumb and motionless. Tears began to trickle down his cheeks. Wiping them with an end of his *dhoti*, he went inside and returned with his land papers. Then he said, "Here are all the papers. You may give what land you like to whom you choose. I have no objection now." The worker filled in a *Dan patra* of 126 bighas, which the zamindar duly signed.

A Bhoodan meeting was being held in a village. As the worker asked for land donations, a woman got up and said, " I have two acres of land. I want to donate it all."

" How would you then support yourself ? " asked he.

" Well, God will look after me."

" But we do not want to create new landless persons."

" I assure you I would be able to make my ends meet by sale of milk and curd. I press you to accept my offer."

Later, the worker approached a big zmindar owning about 600 acres. He appealed to him to donate one hundred acres.

' No, I will not give 100 acres," came the reply.

' Alright, give something less. But do give."

"That I will. I have decided to donate 200 acres. Take it down."

Yet another household. A young boy donated some land. When his father came to know of it, he approached the worker and said, "Please also write down my donation. My son's *dharma* will go along with him, mine will go along with me."

A well attended Bhoodan meeting. After the worker had finished his speech he called upon those present to put in something in *Vinoba baba's* bag. There was a calm for five minutes. Then came a voice, "Let none come forward, I will offer my donation."

"Please stand up," said the worker. "Your name please."

As he stood up and gave his name, everybody in the meeting was struck aghast. For he was the man who would not part even with the banana leaves of his garden for devotional purposes. Also he was the man who had shaved his wife's head because she always required oil to maintain them! Such a miser as he had turned into a *Dani* (donor).

It was virtually a signal. An old man exclaimed, "If this (his name) *dada* of ours has donated land today who can there be such as to refuse it?" And more *Dan patras* followed.

But it is Bihar which has been shaken by Bhoodan to its foundations, and naturally so. Vinoba's name is a household word there. That Bhoodan has found a congenial soil in Bihar is also evident from the great fact that land prices there have tremendously fallen down and land litigation decreased. Nay, purchasers of land are not easily available. Another remarkable thing is that the idea has caught the mass mind and become common talk almost all over the State. Once when I was at Khagaria (in Monghyr district) I saw three persons sitting in the morning by a well, cleaning their teeth and discussing the ownership of sky and earth. They reached the conclusion that if sky belongs to God, so

must be the earth. There is a general feeling in Bihar that land ownership would soon pass away from individual hands. One day, in Saran district, while I was getting the signature of a donor on a *Dan patra*, his adult son and brother tried to dissuade him from doing so. This provoked him to remark : "Do you think that the land we own is going to remain with us long ?"

Of all the districts of Bihar, Vinoba has not yet gone to Champaran, hallowed by Gandhiji's name. Yet his message has reached the people there. When I was at Madhopur Beria in the *terai* area of Champaran, I met an old black-smith, Sri Gajadhar Choudhuri by name, who had had the privilege of working under Gandhiji in 1917. I asked him for his donation. He replied he was too poor to part with anything. I reasoned out the case. Before I could finish he stopped me and said, "I follow what you say. You want my *sanmati* (goodwill) for the Yagna." Struck by this word in this context, I said, "Yes, indeed!" He gratefully donated one *Katha* (about one tenth of an acre) from his share and persuaded his three brothers to make similar gifts.

The new awakening brought about by Bhoodan Yagna can also be gauged by the growing sale of Bhoodan and Vinoba literature. Weeklies or fortnightlies in this connection have begun to appear in several languages of the country. From Patna is published a Hindi weekly, *Bhoodan Yagna Bihar*, edited by Sri Lakshmi Narain, with a regular sale of more than 15,000 copies. About 90 percent of them go to small towns or villages. Of its *Gandhi Jayanti* number, published on October 2, 1953, and costing annas four only, more than 60,000 copies were sold out. An Urdu edition of the same, *Bhoodan Tahreeq*, is published fortnightly. Low-priced books and pamphlets have been sold in thousands.

The U. P. Bhoodan Committee publishes a Hindi weekly of its own, *Bhoodan*, edited by Sri Karan Bhai. Other papers are *Bhoodan Yagna* (Bengali, Calcutta), *Samya Yoga* (Marathi, Wardha), *Bhoodan Yagna* (Marathi, Poona), *Bhoodan Yagna* (Assamese, Gauhati), *Bhoomi Putra* (Gujrati, Ahmedabad),

*Gram Raj* (Hindi, Jaipur), *Sarvodayam* (Tamil, Tirpur), *Sarvodayam* (Malayalam, Kozhikode), etc., etc. Books on Bhoodan are available almost in every important language of India. If the sale of books is any index of public opinion it can be confidently said that of all ideologies current in the country, that of *Samya Yoga* is gaining gound.

An evidence of the cultural and spiritual awakening that the movement is bringing about is the inspiration that it is providing to our poets and men of letters. Folk-songs and popular *Bhajans* in local languages are a common feature. One of the very well-known poet-singers is Kavi Dukhayal, formerly of Sindh. Bhoodan *bhajans* of the great Maharashtra saint, Tukdoji Maharaj, are extremely popular. Stories and plays, novels and dramas, with Bhoodan as their theme are fast growing.

## CHAPTER XII

# IN THREE YEARS

Beginning as a little rivulet in April 1951, the Bhoodan Yagna movement has now become a broad river growing in width and depth day after day. In this short period of three years, crossing all rocks and barriers, it has triumphantly made its way towards the sea. Its tributaries, in the shape of Sampattidan Yagna, Buddhidan Yagna, etc., have also sprung forth, which, feeding as also fed by the mother current, are fast spreading their soothing network all over the country, promising to water it in so refreshing and wholesome a manner as to contribute to the evolution of a new India and a new humanity.

For about a year, Vinoba was almost all alone in sponsoring and propagating the Bhoodan message. After the Sevapuri Sammelan, as we have seen, the movement was joined by others. Among the notable personages who have spread the Bhoodan gospel in different parts of the country during these two years are Sri Shankarrao Deo, Dada Dharmadhikari, Sri Srikrishnadas Jaju and Sri Vallabhswami, and of course, Sri Jayaprakash Narain. In their tours across the country, both Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Acharya Kripalani have referred to the Bhoodan movement in appreciative terms. Acharya Kripalani has also contributed in his *Vigil* some very thoughtful writings on the subject. Our President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad attended the Chandil Sarvodaya Sammelan.

Sri Shankarrao Deo began his country-wide walking tour from Hyderabad State whose western and north-western districts he covered in August and September 1952. Thereafter he went round Tamilnad and Kerala. Then he toured parts of Rajasthan and Ajmer. Early in 1953, he was in Maharashtra and Vidarbha. Next in Assam. In June and

July, 1953, he covered parts of Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat and Bhopal. Vidarbha once more and again in Kerala and Tamilnad. Recently he has been on an intensive tour of Maharashtra.

Dada Dharmadhikari is an old and recognised exponent of Gandhian philosophy and ethics. Presently he is also the working editor of the well-known Hindi monthly, *Sarvodaya*. He is specially invited to Bhoodan camps for imparting the intellectual background to the workers. Except Assam and Vindhya Pradesh, he has been to almost every province during the last two years.

Sri Srikrishnadas Jaju, the eldest and oldest amongst the constructive workers of our country, has, disregarding age and comfort, become an active emissary of Bhoodan Yagna movement. A native of Bikaner as he is, he took to Rajasthan where he spent three months and succeeded—thanks to the unremitting labour of Rajasthan workers like Sri Gokulbhai Bhatt and Sri Sidharaj Dhaddha—in realizing the Rajasthan initial quota of Two lakh acres. Jajuji is the president of the Madhya Pradesh Bhoodan Board formed according to the Madhya Pradesh Bhoodan Act.

Sri Vallabhswami is rightly regarded as Vinoba's most trusted lieutenant who has grown under his austere training and guidance since 1920. Though past 40, he looks younger and is really young. Like his master, he too is fond of unostentatious and silent work. But Bhoodan has brought him out of his Wardha shell and during the last two years he has carried the Bhoodan banner in parts of Madhya Pradesh, Karnatak, Mysore, Vindhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamilnad, Assam and Andhra. Frequently he has been keeping Vinoba's company in U. P. and Bihar. As a joint secretary of Sarv Seva Sangh, he is also the in-charge of the central Bhoodan office of the Sangh at Wardha.

A large part of 1953 was devoted by Sri Jayaprakash Narain to Bhoodan work. He visited the States of Hyderabad, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamilnad, Punjab, Rajasthan, U. P. and, of course, his home-province of Bihar. Attracting

huge crowds, Sri Jayaprakash tells them the vast potentialities of Vinoba's movement and points out their duty at this critical hour of national history. Besides, he has been appealing to the youth to come forward and participate in the basically revolutionary campaign of Bhoodan Yagna.

Other leading workers in the field are Sant Tukdoji, Ravi Shankar Maharaj, Lakshmi Babu, Sri Dhirendra Mazumdar, Sri Anna Sahasrabuddhe (who is also another joint secretary of Sarv Seva Sangh), Sri Gopabandhu Choudhury, Sri Charu Chandra Bhandari, and Sri E. Ikkanda Warrier. Sri Charubabu of W. Bengal, was the chief of the Praja Socialist Party and also the leader of the opposition in W. Bengal Assembly. But in September 1953, he resigned his Assembly seat as also the primary membership of the Party in order to give himself whole heartedly to Bhoodan work. Perhaps his is the first example of an M.L.A. having resigned his Assembly membership for the sake of Bhoodan.

Almost every province has a Bhoodan Committee with a convener or secretary.

In Assam, on our north-eastern frontior, the convener is Sri Bhuwan Chandra Das. Another active worker is Smt. Amalprabha Dutta who has a passion for constructive work. They have organized camps and *Pad-Yatras* (walking-tours) in different parts of their State.

Andhra, though a new State, is old in Khadi and other constructive work. Sri Subrahmanyan is the convener there. Swami Sitaram, Andhra's well-known constructive worker, has for some time now been taking active interest in Bhoodan work. The call of Bhoodan has also forced Sri Prabhakar, the unassuming doctor of Sevagram hospital, an old inmate of Gandhiji's Ashram and a native of Andhra, to do some work in his home province.

Bengal has as yet not gathered that heat with which it is known to sacrifice itself for a cause. Yet slowly and steadily, its Bhoodan tempo is rising. Charu Babu's resignation from

all non-Bhoodan activities has attracted public attention. Other workers are Sri Panchanan Bose and Sri Chandidas Ghosh. Smt. Ashadevi Aryanayakam, a Bengali by birth, Ceylonese by marriage and Sevagrami by adoption, has recently given some time for Bhoodan work in her home-province.

Bihar is singularly fortunate in having been chosen by Vinoba as a test-case for examining the potentialities of the Bhoodan Yagna campaign. The number of workers there is naturally larger than elsewhere. The main burden of the work has fallen on the shoulders of Sri Laxmibabu, Bihar's sincerest and oldest constructive worker. He is the convener of the Bihar Bhoodan Committee which has two more members, Sri Baidyanath Choudhury and Sri Gauri Shankar Saran Singh. The latter two are doing concentrated work in their home districts of Purnea and Gaya respectively. Among other prominent Bhoodan workers in Bihar are Sris Dhwaja Prasad Sahu, Ram Deo Thakur, Ram Bilas Sharma, Kandarp Nath Sahadeo (of Palkot), Paras Nath Sharma, as also the Raja of Ramgarh. Among those who have gone to work in Bihar from Vinoba's Paramdham Ashram or from other Wardha institutions are Shanta Narulkar, Dwarko, Giridhar, Govind Rao, Govindan, Pandharinath, Chandu Naik, Om Prakash Gupta, Chandrika Pandey and Ravi Shankar Sharma. Bihar Ministers, specially Sri Srikrishna Singh and Sri Anugraha Narain Singh, Chief Minister and Finance Minister respectively, have also been taking good interest in the work.

New Delhi is not prominent on the Bhoodan map. Members of Parliament, however, have formed a Bhoodan Committee with Sri Radha Raman as convener. Among the M. P.'s who are actively interested in Bhoodan are Smt. Sucheta Kripalani, Sri S. N. Agrawala, Seth Govind Das and Sri Maithili Saran Gupta, to name only a few. Sri S. N. Agrawala, General Secretary of the A. I. C. C., has aptly pleaded the Bhoodan cause in some of his writings as well. The Delhi State Bhoodan Committee has Sri Jyoti Prakash as its convener. Smt. Rameshwari Nehru, an old and distinguished social

worker, has given some of her time to Bhoodan, both in Delhi and E. Punjab. A mention has already been made of Smt. Jankidevi Bajaj's work who secured donations for construction of wells, (*Koop dan*) from many a leading light in Delhi.

Of all constructive workers in the country, Hari Ballabh Parikh, a young enthusiast of Baroda district in Gujarat, was the only one who reached the Sevapuri Sammelan after collecting no less than 1,000 acres of land. Gujarat is very fortunate in having an active group of youthful workers who have made Bhoodan Yagna their first concern, *e. g.*, Narayan Desai (son of the late Mahadeo Desai), Mohanlal Parikh (son of Sri Narhari Parikh), Raojibhai Manibhai Patel, Prabodh Chowkse, Chowtrabhai Shah, Nandlal Thakkar and of course, Hari Ballabh Parikh. The older generation in Gujarat is not altogether silent. In fact, the chief captain of Bhoodan fleet in Gujarat is the good old Ravi Shankar Maharaj, perhaps the most loved and honoured and familiar name throughout the countryside of Gujarat. *Maharaj,* as he is popularly called, has decided to devote all his time for Bhoodan until 1957. Others among the elders are Sris Jugatram Dave and Maganbhai Desai. Sri Kedarnathji (Guruji) is the convener of the Bombay Bhoodan Committee.

In Hyderabad lies the *Gangotri* of the Bhoodan Ganga. Sri U. Keshav Rao is the convener of the Hyderabad Bhoodan Committee. Swami Ramanand Tirth, former chief of the provincial Congress and Sri Ramkrishna Rao, the Chief Minister, have also taken good interest in the movement. The tours of Sri. Shankarrao Deo and Jayaprakash Narain gave it a further lift. The work of land distribution is also in progress. By the end of 1953, 10,354 acres of land had been distributed among 2,199 families in Hyderabad State. Himachal Pradesh is a small State where Sri Dharm Deo Shastri, the convener, is piloting the boat. Among his co-workers are Sri Surat Ram Prakash and Mahant Udhodas.

The convener of Bhoodan work in Karnatak is Sri Timappa Naik. The tours of Sris Vallabhswami and Anna

Entering a village in Telangana

Sahasrabuddhe have set the ball rolling there. Among the few workers giving whole time for Bhoodan are Sris Sadashiv Rao Bhonsle and Shankarrao Gulwadi.

Kerala, the tiny land-strip in the south–west, between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats, is India's beauty-spot with a world of its own. Grinding poverty has deprived it much of its charm. Foreign planters continue to dominate its life. Yet Bhoodan is forging its way ahead, Sri E. Ikkanda Warrier, former Chief Minister of Cochin State, being the convener. Two walking–tours of Sri Shankarrao Deo have given it a tremendous impetus. Among the young workers are Sris P. Manmathan, K. Nair, Thomas Cherian, A. P. Vasu Nambisan and Kumari Rajamma.

Madhya Bharat, though coming late in the race, stands seventh among all the States and is a close rival of its neighbour, Madhya Pradesh. Sri Vishwanath Khode, former Chief Minister of Indore, is in charge of the work there. The visits of Sri Srikrishnadas Jaju and Dada Dharmadhikari have much helped in smoothening the course. Prominent among those working there are Sri Baij Nath Mahodaya and Ambaram Munim. Fond of walking tours himself, Khodeji has raised up a good band of young workers.

Dada Bhai Naik, convener of the Madhya Pradesh Bhoodan Committee, accompanied Vinoba throughout his Madhya Pradesh tour. Though belonging to a Hindi speaking area, he attracts good crowds in the Marathi parts of Madhya Pradesh as well. Madhya Pradesh is doubly fortunate—eminent and capable workers, both old and young, have taken to Bhoodan work there. Among the former are Sant Tukdoji, Dada Dharmadhikari, Smt. Shanta Narulkar, Seth Govind Das, Dr. More, Veohar Rajendra Singh, Tatyaji Wajhalwar, Babaji Moghe and Gopalrao Kale; and among the latter are Vimala Thakar, Thakurdas Bang, D. J. Hatekar, Y. B. Patankar, Sadashiv Gadre, Ganga Prasad Gupta and Mahipal Singh. Besides, there are the Wardha stalwarts and office-bearers of Sarv Seva Sangh. About a thousand acres of land has already been distributed in this province.

Maharashtra, Vinoba's home province, is gradually recovering lost ground. Sri Appasaheb Patwardhan is the convener. Among other notable workers are Sris Anna Sahasrabudhe, Bhau Dharmadhikari, Manakchand Doshi, N. G. Goray, and Smt. Premabai Kantak.

In Mysore, Sri B. Narayanappa is in charge of the work. Sri Vallabhswami who has spent considerable time during the last two years in Mysore, has succeeded in giving a good start to the movement there. Sri Anantrangachar is an active, young worker.

Orissa, though a small and poor province, is fast going ahead in Bhoodan work. The credit for this essentially goes to Sri Gopabandhu Choudhury, former secretary of *Sarvodaya Samaj*. Both he and his wife, Smt. Ramadevi, who have dedicated their life to constructive work, have zealously taken up the Bhoodan programme. Their whole family, including the son and daughter-in-law, the daughter and son-in-law, is busy in Bhoodan. Gopababu's brother and Orissa's Chief Minister, Sri Nabakrishna Choudhury and his wife, Smt. Maltidevi also take active interest in it. The convener of the Orissa Committee is Sri Sarat Chandra Maharana, a tried and enthusiastic worker. Among other workers are Sris Manmohan Chowdhury, Ishwarlal Vyas, Vishwanath Patnaik, Ram Krishna, Nimai Charan and Acharya Harihardas.

In Punjab and Pepsu, like Bengal, Bhoodan current is slowly finding its way. The convener of the Bhoodan work there is Lala Achintaram. The young woman worker, Satya Bala, already referred to, has well captured popular imagination and she is devotedly occupied in the task. Other workers like Sri Ganeshlal are coming into the field.

Rajasthan, in keeping with its heroic traditions, is the only State which has completed, almost single-handed, its Sevapuri quota. U. P. and Bihar have also done likewise, but—rightly say the Rajasthanwallahs—they had the unique fortune and privelege of having Vinoba in their midst. The credit for Rajasthan work is due to Sri Gokulbhai Bhatt, the

convener. Prominent among other workers are Sris Siddharaj Dhaddha, Bhadooram Joshi, Phoolchand Baphna and Rameshwar Agrawala. Sri Balwantrai Mehta, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress, has also shown good interest in the same.

In Saurashtra, Sri Vajubhai Shah is the convener. Amongst his collaborators are Sris Ravi Dave, Nanabhai Bhatt, Kanu Gandhi and Jayantilal Malpani, Muni Santbalji, an old and respected name in Saurashtra, has recently interested himself in Bhoodan work and given a good lift to the compaign there.

Tamilnad, in the far-off south, is steadily gaining ground. Of all the Bhoodan conveners in the country, Tamilnad's Sri Jagannathan is perhaps the youngest. He accompanied Vinoba for about four months in U. P. and has now given himself up entirely to the cause. Sri Shankarrao Deo has been there twice. Sri Jayaprakash Narain, accompanied by Sri Kamaraj Nadar, president of the Tamilnad Provincial Congress Committee, spent a fortnight there. This combined tour of Sris Jayaprakash and Kamaraj is a highly significant, though very unusual, event of modern India. It definitely illustrates that of all movements and programmes in the country Bhoodan is the only one which is above class, caste or party differences. Among other active workers in Tamilnad are Sri N. Ramaswami (also the editor of the English monthly, *Sarvodaya*) and his wife Karthiyaniammal, Ram Chandra Reddiar and Mangal Pattabhiramayya.

Uttar Pradesh is India's most populated State with no less than 51 districts. But the number of devoted workers is correspondingly small. The two wheels, as it were, of the U. P. Bhoodan chariot are Baba Raghavadas and Sri Karan Bhai, the latter being the secretary of the U. P. Bhoodan Committee presided over by Sri Purshotamdas Tandon. Among other prominent Bhoodan workers of the province are Sris Shatrughan Singh, Nauranglal, Kapildeo Pande and Mahashai Pyarelal. Two distinguished constructive workers of U. P., Swami Satyanand and Sri Girwar Sahai, who took

good interest in Bhoodan work, passed away in July and October 1953, respectively. The younger group includes Sris Ram Murti Singh, Arjun Singh, Brahmadeo Bajpai, Tarunbhai, Lakshmindra Prakash, Srikant Tiwari, Ram Briksha Singh and Saligram Pathick. The work of land distribution is in good progress there, 27,922 acres having been distributed by December 1953 to 5,223 families. In Vindhya Pradesh, Sri Chaturbhuj Pathak is the convener.

As observed earlier the total land collections on the eve of Sevapuri Sammelan amounted to 1,02,361 acres. The position of Bhoodan collections at about the close of 1952 and the begining of 1954 is illustrated in the following table :

TABLE X

| No. | Province | Land collected ( acres ) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | By December 7, 1952 | By January 7, 1954 |
| 1 | Assam .. | ...... | 1,349 |
| 2 | Andhra .. | 7,022 | 10,299 |
| 3 | Bengal .. | 32 | 452 |
| 4 | Bihar .. | 45,081 | 13,23,796 |
| 5 | Delhi .. | 1,124 | 7,745 |
| 6 | Gujarat .. | 6,224 | 20,845 |
| 7 | Himachal Pradesh .. | 1,006 | 1,360 |
| 8 | Hyderabad .. | 30,224 | 73,258 |
| 9 | Karnatak .. | 99 | 1,669 |
| 10 | Kerala .. | 5,500 | 11,100 |
| 11 | Madhya Bharat .. | 2,491 | 57,649 |
| 12 | Madhya Pradesh .. | 12,526 | 64,346 |
| 13 | Maharashtra .. | 239 | 10,380 |
| 14 | Mysore .. | 19 | 2,516 |
| 15 | Orissa .. | 2,384 | 50,783 |
| 16 | Punjab-Pepsu .. | 211 | 3,584 |
| 17 | Rajasthan .. | 10,558 | 2,34,376 |
| 18 | Saurashtra .. | ...... | 8,000 |
| 19 | Tamilnad .. | 6,442 | 18,538 |
| 20 | Uttar Pradesh .. | 3,10,729 | 5,00,891 |
| 21 | Vindhya Pradesh .. | 1,283 | 4,087 |
| | Total .. | 4,43,194 | 24,07,023 |

The attitude of political parties and leaders towards the Bhoodan Yagna movement during the last three years has

been varied and interesting. It was first taken notice of by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minster and Congress President, who wrote a personal letter to Vinoba in May 1951 appreciating his work when he was in Telangana. But perhaps the first public appreciation of the Bhoodan Yagna movement came from Acharya J. B. Kripalani. As early as in October 1951, he issued an appeal to the people of U. P. in general and constructive workers in particular to make Vinoba's tour a success. In his statement, Acharya Kripalani observed :

> "I have watched with keen interest Vinoba's efforts to follow the Gandhian way for restoration of land to the tenants and the landless. At a time when all practical schemes of Gandhiji for political, social, and economic reform—specially economic reform—have been abandoned by our Governments it is heartening to see that there is one whose faith stands out in bright contrast to the general cynicism of post-independence years. With his great penetrating and adequate conception and his austere life of *Sadhana*, Vinoba is most eminently fitted for the work he has undertaken. It was no accident that made Gandhiji choose him as the first satyagrahi to inaugurate individual civil disobedience against the war-effort of the British in India ten years back. Vinoba was little known then. But Bapu with unerring insight chose him for initiating the movement. Gandhiji knew that unlike his previous mass movements,Individual Satyagraha emphasized the individual who stood fearless even when deprived of the psychylogical support of fellow-travellers. In the same spirit Vinoba is again singly and by himself out to solve some aspects of the agrarian problem in India.
>
> "He is holding a conference of constructive workers at Mathura on 1st November, preparatory to his tour on foot throughout Uttar Pradesh. I wish the conference and his tour success. May it open the eyes of the sceptical to yet unexplored possibilities of the

Gandhian way. May it afford our leaders necessary guidance in their high and delicate task. Without such guidance this country, so desperately in need of social reconstruction, is likely to fall a prey to cruel and bloody creeds, whether of right or left. The real fight today is between methods of reform that are moral and those that are materialistic. If moral methods get no chance because of want of faith and effort, those of violence, hatred and untruth are bound to follow. For the demand grows insistent that men's pressing needs must be fulfilled anyhow. I call upon all constructive workers in Uttar Pradesh to see that everything is done to make Vinoba's pilgrimage a success. I also request the public to respond to his call and make his path smooth."

The political party, however, first noticing it was the Socialist Party of India (now called the Praja Socialist Party) which, at its Pachmarhi (M. P.) convention in May, 1952, passed a long resolution captioned, "Redistribution of Land." In para 14 of that resolution it said :

"This convention notes with joy the noble effort of Acharya Vinoba Bhave to draw the attention of the nation to the urgency and justice of this problem by his unique method of *Bhoodhan*. The Socialist Party further welcomes the move of the Sarvodaya Samaj in this direction and reciprocates its invitation for co-operation."

In the Congress organisation, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, as has been said earlier, was the first to pass a resolution in October, 1952, for the Bhoodan Yagna movement, calling upon its subordinate committees and workers to fulfill the quota of four lakh acres.

On 26th December 1952, the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee met at Poona and passed a resolution justifying the quota of one lakh acres as fixed for Maharashtra by Sarv Sev Sangh at its Sevapuri meeting. The resolution urged upon the workers to fullfil this quota zealously and

'seek the co-operation of people of all shades of opinion.' It also appointed a committee consisting of Sri Devakinandan Narayan, Bhausaheb Hiray, Nanasaheb Kunte, Shamrao Patil and Ratnappa Kumbhar, to plan for the same.

In January 1953, the Indian National Congress at its annual session at Hyderabad passed a Bhoodan Yagna resolution to the following effect:

> "The annual session of the Indian National Congress deeply appreciates the Bhoodan Yagna movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and appeals to the countrymen, specially the Congress workers, to give active support and co-operation to this movement. It also requests the Central and the State governments to do their best for its success."

After the Hyderabad Congress Session, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, U. P.'s Chief Minister, made an appeal to the people of Uttar Pradesh to meet Vinoba's initial demand of five lakh acres from that State. In the course of it, he remarked:

> "The public of Uttar Pradesh is well aware of the Bhoodan Yagna movement of Vinobaji. Going from village to village for several months in this State, he has given a new inspiration to the people and produced a new atmosphere. The main objective of his movement is that the landless villagers should obtain without any struggle and conflict the right over land which they may require to meet their needs. Wiping off the feelings of high and low, he wants to give a new shape and prestige to village-society on the basis of brotherhood, so that morality may develop and all people may work with dignity in a wholesome manner according to their capacity....
>
> "I hope that the people of Uttar Pradesh will soon fulfill Vinobaji's demand for five lakh acres with zeal and devotion, and with a broad family vision our village society will march ahead towards progress."

On the occasion of Vinoba's 58th birthday, on 11th September, 1953, both the President and Prime Minister issued appeals to the nation. Dr. Rajendra Prasad said :

" Shri Acharya Vinobaji's *Bhoodan Yagna* will not be completed till such time as those, who are given land received in *Bhoodan*, do not get the necessary assistance for their rehabilitation. That is why Vinobaji has begun the work of *Sampattidan Yagna*. Water is absolutely essential for agriculture. For that wells and other water resources are needed. Hence the talk of *Koop Dan* and it is a matter of gratification that people have begun to respond enthusiastically to this call. I hope and trust that this *Yagna* will also become popular and will enthuse our people as was the case with Bhoodan Yagna. My request to all is to join this task and help in the *Poorna Yagna*. "

Pandit Jawaharlal's message read as follows :

" Today is the birthday of Acharya Vinobaji. We should so celebrate this day as to help the success of his mission. It is not his mission alone; it is the mission of every one of us, of the entire country.

" Through his long and arduous tours in the country he has instilled new life amongst our people. His powerful call for Bhoodan has resounded in the whole country, many heard it and responded to it to the best of their capacity. I hope that on this day we shall all make efforts to further this great cause.

" Now Vinobaji has placed a new idea before the nation. He has talked of *Sampattidan* in order to rehabilitate and help the landless peasants. He has specially called for the construction of new wells. Our peasant will not be benefitted much if he gets only land and is given no other assistance. Wells are needed in the whole country. I hope and trust that everyone will ponder over Vinobaji's new message and specially help the construction of wells."

Both of them have donated for *Koop Dan* while Rajendra Babu has also contributed to the Bhoodan Yagna.

Among noted Congressmen who have participated in or continue to do so in the Bhoodan movement are Sris Baidyanath Choudhury, S. N. Agrawala, Baba Raghavadas, Seth Govind Das, Kamaraja Nadar, Nabakrishna Choudhury, Swami Ramanand Tirth, to mention a few. Of course the contribution of Bihar Congress and its ministers for obvious reasons exceeds that of their counterparts in other provinces. At its meeting in May, 1953 at Gaya, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution for collecting 32 lakh acres as called for by Vinoba to solve Bihar's land problem. Further, on 6th December, 1953, the Purnea District Congress Committee, whose moving spirit is Sri Baidyanath Choudhury, passed a resolution calling upon its members to do their best to collect the district quota of three lakh acres in the shortest possible time.

The outstanding contribution of the Praja Socialist Party to the Bhoodan movement is the personality of Sri Jayaprakash Narain, its most popular leader. He has taken to it with a devotion next only to Vinoba's. He has brought new life and blood into it. He has awakened the intelligentsia of the country to the depth and significance of the Bhoodan programme.

At a meeting held on 28th November, 1952, the Working Committee of the Bihar Praja Socialist Party passed a resolution asking the party-members to take a solid step themselves and carry out by February 15, 1953, certain instructions so far as their own land was concerned. Those instructions were :

1. Those who own more than 30 acres of land shall donate one-sixth or the portion above 30 acres, whichever be greater.

2. Those who own less than 30 acres should also donate one-sixth at least and those having below five should also donate as much as they can.

3. Those whose land forms part of a joint family should donate out of their share according to the above procedure.

In June, 1953, the Maharashtra branch of the Praja Socialist Party also passed a resolution instructing its members to donate one-sixth of their land or the amount beyond 30 acres.

Thus far about the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party. The attitude of the other organisations obtaining in the country has also been helpful. Sri Guruji Golwalkar, the renowned leader of R. S. S., saw Vinoba at Meerut in November 1951 and expressing his satisfaction at the movement remarked, "From the very beginning I have been very much attracted to the first three *Shlokas* of *Isha Vasya Upanishad.* And your work does stand on their basis." At Lalitpur, in October, 1951, Vinoba met the famous Jain saint, Sri Ganeshji Varni who promised every help and co-operation to the movement. Members of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh have spoken highly of the movement because, as they say, it is in keeping with Indian tradition and culture. Like Hindus, Muslims and Christians also have liberally donated to Bhoodan Yagna.

The Communist Party of India has maintained a very cautious attitude towards the Bhoodan movement. When Vinoba obtained donations in Telengana it attributed them to the extraordinary atmosphere prevailing there. Next when Vinoba marched on to Delhi and thereafter in Uttar Pradesh, some of its members and sympathisers called Vinoba an 'agent of zamindars' and termed the Bhoodan movement as a 'farce to perpetuate exploitation' of the poor. Conceding the former title, Vinoba claimed to be a representative of the poor as also a zamindars' agent (but not of zamindari) provided the latter made him one. But he regretted that the communists could not appreciate whether his was a move to give a long lease to exploitation and proverty or to wipe them out. Yet he felt certain that there would come a time when communists, friends of the poor as they also were, would change their opinion about him. Perhaps, the change has come. In August last, Sri A. K. Gopalan, leader of the

Communist Party in the Parliament, declared that though he felt that the land problem could not be solved without legislative measures yet he had "no opposition" to the Bhoodan movement. Hearing this, Vinoba remarked at a public meeting in Bhagalpur district that that was an instance of the change of heart and that the moment he obtained 32 lakh acres of land in Bihar, more than 90 per cent among communists, except, if at all, the few die-hards, would be entirely converted to his view. In Telangana, as we have seen, he met some of them in jail. Later in his tours he has been meeting them. While he was in eastern U. P., they came to his meetings in large numbers. At times they have donated him land and also presented him a welcome address. In Bihar they come in frequent contact with him. And with the deeper progress of Bhoodan work among the small land-holders as also the landless, their appreciation of the movement is bound to grow warmer. How Vinoba himself feels towards them is clear from what he once said in Bihar :

> " My Yagna did begin in Telangana, but not because of communists. I want to assure my communist friends that I bear no ill-feeling towards them. On the other hand, my feelings are good. God made a mistake in not equipping the breast with a window to know the inside of our heart. Had there been one you would find that I am full of love towards the communists."

In fact, he is full of love towards all and has equal regard for all. To be frank, Vinoba refuses to recognise the labels of parties or classes. He only knows individuals as men and women whose service and welfare is his constant concern. Addressing a meeting he once said :

> " I do not recognise parties at all. Moreover, my study of history, experience of current affairs and thinking, all lead me to the conclusion that parties in our country can not only not do much good but are in the long run likely to prove disastrous.... Service of our fellow-beings must be our sole objective."

It must also be added that Vinoba himself is a member of no organisation or group. His name does not appear even on the register of *Sarvodaya Samaj* which owes its birth to him. Like a free creature of God, Vinoba knows no bounds or shackles and carries on his quest incessantly. Little wonder that he has struck upon a programme which is not only an echo of the reverberations of the hearts of the dumb millions of our country, not only above all party-politics and petty disputes, requiring no external force or agency for its fulfillment, but is also of such a fundamental nature that no Government, party or individual can ignore it. Which is why the Bhoodan Yagna campaign has come to command the confidence and respect of the intelligent sections of our population to an increasing extent. This factor alone, let go others, establishes its basically revolutionary character. The response which it has obtained at the hands of the unsophisticated masses of India during the last three years bears witness to the same.

PART III

# PHILOSOPHY AND TECHNIQUE OF THE MOVEMENT

## CHAPTER XIII

# BASIS AND APPROACH

A little less than two hundred years ago when the British succeeded in overthrowing their rivals in the field and secured an undisputed sway over India, they found that she really lived in villages standing on their own feet, specially with regard to the basic needs of food and clothing. They felt that they could not long stay here unless they broke into this self-sufficient chamber. Accordingly they thought of a subtle device to cut off these feet. It was to let, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru beautifully puts it in his *Discovery of India*, 'money economy creep in' in our villages. Soon, 'land became a marketable commodity,' which vitally affected our agrarian system and agriculture. Also, the money economy helped them to dump British cloth on our village markets, which crushed our cloth self-sufficiency so devastatingly as to make Lord Bentinck remark that the 'bones of the cotton weavers were bleaching the plains of India.' For about two centuries, the British, in a scientific and intelligent manner, carried on their crippling activities. It has resulted in reducing our villages to the horror they are today.

A look at a village, specially in U. P. or Bihar, reveals that its residents may be broadly classified into four categories :

(A) *Big zamindars* ( हाथीवाले or elephant owners ) : They possess a hundred or more acres of land, have a *pucca* house,

maintain an elephant, a car or jeep, use tractor for cultivation, keep an iron safe, employ armed guards in service, do no cultivation work themselves, lead a life of pleasure and enjoy every luxury.

(B) *Rich peasants* (घोड़ेवाले or horse owners) : They possess twenty or more acres of land, have a solidly built house if not *pucca*, maintain a horse or cycle, use a bullock cart with rubber tyre wheels, keep a fodder-cutting machine, do no cultivation work themselves and lead a well-nigh rich life.

(C) *Poor peasants* (बैलवाले or bullock owners) : They possess but a little piece of land (sometimes a fraction of an acre), have *Kachcha* house, maintain a bullock, use a bullock cart with wooden wheels, keep no machine but a cow, buffalo or goat, do cultivation work themselves (some of them may not) and lead a hard life.

(D) *Landless labourers* (बेज़मीन) : They own no land, have the imitation of a house, maintain no animal at all, work as cultivating labourers, have no guarantee about the day's meal, are denied the basic necessities and lead a sub-human life.

Roughly their percentage in a village may be represented as follows :

A : B : C : D : : 5 : 12 : 43 : 40.

Such villages are also there where the proportion is :

A : B : C : D : : 0 : 6 : 44 : 50.

Now what we find presently common among A, B, C and D is :

(i) They use cloth, utensils, shoes etc., not made in their village itself, get cereals grounded (largely) in mills ;

(ii) They smoke cigarette or *bidi* coming from with- out and often they also drink ;

(iii) They run for cheap things and cheaper ;

(iv) They grow such crops as may bring them money and more money.

Next, the common features of A, B and C besides those mentioned above, are :

(i) They like to do no physical labour themselves;

(ii) They are anxious to pay (D) least in lieu of maximum work, exploit it as much as they can ;

(iii) They cater to the taste of the market whose main supplier is (A);

(iv) They want to keep (D) within their own hold.

Here follow things common between A and B :

(i) They are anxious to usurp land owned by (C);

(ii) They charge as much interest as possible for the money they lend to (C) or (D) ;

(iii) They want (C) to grow such a crop as may come straight to them ;

(iv) They pay such wages to (D)—to (C) also in some cases—as may always compel it to run to them to meet any need whatever.

And the characterstics of (A) are :

(i) They have a passion to seize the land owned by (B) or (C) ;

(ii) They will let grow such crops as may either feed the mills in the locality or be required by the city banker ;

(iii) They control the money market of the village;

(iv) They enjoy the confidence of the Government in power.

One can easily gather from the above that our village has a pyramid-like structure with the landless at the base. On their top lie the bullock-owners, almost equal in number or

greater. Still higher above them are stationed a few horse-owners. And at the apex are the lordly elephant-owners. And all of them over the shoulders of the landless below. Thus in the British-founded economic order, our landless millions, harried through numberless exactions and extortions by those who aggrandize themselves on their (of the landless) labour, have to linger in the shadows of their dreadfully wretched hovels, with pale and lustreless faces, leading an existence, as Gandhiji described, of " eternal vigil or eternal trance."

It is because of this conical economic structure that the juice of Government schemes and projects, almost without disturbing the old order, is sucked at the outest by those of category (A). The little that may be left out, together with scrappings, passes to (B). There is hardly anything left for the poor (C). And (D) comes nowhere in the picture indeed. Even the various land reform measures all over the country have failed to touch (D). The forces and agencies which exploited (C) and (D), continue to flourish almost as well today as during the alien rule. That is why both (C) and (D) have not yet felt the glow of Swaraj. In popular parlance, as Vinoba puts it, the *Swaraj*-parcel, which has left London no doubt, has been very much unloaded at New Delhi and the rest at Calcutta or Bombay, Madras or Nagpur, Lucknow or Patna, whence it did not reach the village at all!

We thus find that the official mind or machinery in free India has not so far succeeded, despite its earnest attempts for the same, in supplying the required material to feed the foundation of the structure called India that is Bharat. Nay, to all intents and purposes, that foundation has been rendered still weaker as evident from the wide gulf, confessed as such by those in authority and others, growing between the rulers and the ruled as also that between the rich and the poor. The paramount problem before India today is to provide flesh and blood to the landless at the base. For it is they who are the main source of life and vitality pulsating in all others. Should their (of the landless) veins continue to get drier and faces

paler, the others would scarcely be able to do more than keep a semblance of life, that too only with the breath blown through them by some protecting or 'aiding' power, alien or otherwise. The question is of building the nation at the bottom, not adorning it at the top. The issue is so simple yet so profound and terrible and deep that it is given to but a few to think about it consistently, to fewer to reach at some definite conclusion about it and to fewer still to give that a practical shape. Once the base is made firm and strong, the rest of the structure can be easily remodelled or even rebuilt. But if the base remains weak and the top grows heavier, all will come down with a crash the moment the base cracks or slips off.

Again to revert to the pyramid above. Those of (A) and (B) own land and the means of production while they do not themselves work upon them. On the contrary, (C) and (D) own little or no land or any other means of production while they have to work upon them. We meet the curious spectacle that those who have capacity to work own no material to work with while those who do not work command all resources. There is, therefore, nothing surprising if our food or cloth production has fallen down. Further, as the current economic system encourages (A) and (B) to capture more land and resources, *i. e.*, helps them to deprive (C) and (D) of the little they may have, production is bound to get shorter: which, in its turn, throwing (C) and (D) still more into the jaws of (A) and (B), deprives them of their independence to a greater extent. And the vicious circle continues. Should it go on unchecked, it would ultimately reduce our villages to (A)-owned production farms employing (C) and (D) as petty labourers with (B) acting as (A)'s agents or farm-supervisors. Besides, the destiny of (A) would be controlled by a few big businessmen or industrialists and bankers who would themselves be dancing to the tune of the yet bigger foreign businessmen. And all this in the name of progress and speed !

To recapitulate, the primary task before the young and free Indian Republic is to discover ways and means whereof

her landless millions may obtain land or employment so that they may earn an honest living by the sweat of their brow. The second important question is how to direct the production resources so as to raise our production higher and save us from becoming another man's tool.

Vinoba contends that there should be no landless in our country any more. Everybody must have land to till or some other work whereby he can eke out his living. And his straightforward answers to the above two questions are :

( i ) Ownership of land, property or resources must be declared as God's ( *i.e.*, society's ) ;

( ii ) He who eats must do some productive work and the present differences between wages or salaries must go ;

( iii ) A major part of political and economic power should rest in the village.

Of these three replies, few will concur with all of them. As regards (i), some would like the ownership to vest with the State while others would prefer individual ownership as at present. To the latter portion of (ii) hardly anybody would object, while very few would concede the former. And with (iii) only a small number would agree. It is submitted that the curse of landlessness or unemployment cannot be got rid of unless all the three items are sincerely carried out in practice in their entirety. Which, by the way, provides the key to Vinoba's technique to solve the problem as also to his approach.

His technique can be summed up thus :

(a) To (A) he says : 'Give me as much land as you can, keeping with you what you require for maintenance and self-cultivation.'

(b) To (B) he says : 'Give me at least one-sixth and work the rest yourself ' ;

(c) To (C) he says : 'Give me whatever you can

as a token gift, but give you must and I shall give you more if need be.'

And to all of them he says :

(d) 'Hands off please ! Land is neither yours nor mine. Nor is it such a one whose honour you may put to barter. Land is verily the mother, yielding food and plenty. It is God's who made it. It is God's as are air, water, sky and light. Whoever shall work at it would enjoy its fruit.'

(e) 'This is an age of comradely love or brotherly equality. The days of lording over ryots and serfs have gone for good. India is free. The poorest man has one vote like the richest or the tallest. The poor man is the real ruler who can make and unmake ministries and the rest. Now when power rests with the poor, ownership cannot rest with a handful of rich.'

Thus Vinoba is no beggar wanting something by way of charity or gift. He is like a teacher who wants to "throw open the gates of new life" to the taught. Though he calls his movement *Bhoodan Yagna*, he uses the word *Dan* not in its superstitious sense but in what Shankaracharya defined as दानं संविभागः (equitable distribution). He demands *Dan* because :

1. He wants land to be distributed justly and equitably among one and all ;

2. He wants the donor to do his duty towards himself and his neighbour ;

3. He wants it as a right of the *Daridranarayan*, of the landless poor who have been deprived of it on account of the vicious economic system in vogue.

4. He wants all to work at it and none to 'keep' it to earn unfair money.

Vinoba uses the word *Yagna*, meaning sacrifice, because :

1. He wants all to set fire to the feeling of 'possession' or 'ownership' of land, be it a fraction of an acre or a thousand acres;

2. He wants to teach every one of us that it is our duty to be concerned about the welfare of our hungry neighbour and so long as he is in distress we should resist the temptation to enjoy our happiness ourselves;

3. He wants every producer to be provided with the means of production;

4. He wants all residents of a village or locality to breathe the wholesome air of the whole village rather than suffocate themselves in the narrow surroundings of 'my family'.

5. He wants to initiate all to the need of dedication in each and every activity.

Bhoodan Yagna, therefore, denotes no isolated act of selfish generosity. Nor is it a pretence promising treasures in the next world. It is but a plea for one's submission to the Eternal Will as embodied in the form of the poorest, the lowliest and the lost. It is an outlet for the sublimation of what one has. It is a promise of rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God that are God's. It washes clean the richness of the rich and the poverty of the poor. It brings them together not to devour or dupe each other but to make them recover their lost self, lead natural manly life and serve the world with the best in them both. It is not a wanton deed performed to oblige some one, but a continuous process of giving to the society from which we all ever take. It is not a ritual for self-gratification, but a discipline for self-fulfillment. Bhoodan is not a subjective operation with an eye on fruit, but a frame of mind tuned to 'spontaneous self-giving, a surrender to a greater consciousness of which we are a limitation.'

In order to convey his message, Vinoba goes from door to door with the spirit of a missionary, seeks to approach all,

( A ), ( B ) or ( C ), with utter humility, explains to them the truth behind the words, *All Land Belongs to Gopal*; and if they grasp the new idea he wants them to donate land in a fitting manner even as the payee gives a receipt in acknowledgement of the amount received. But if they do not he worries little and goes ahead, literally observing the Koranic doctrine :

> "And endure what they say with patience and depart from them with a decorous departure."

Vinoba does not confine his Yagna to land gifts only. Like five senses, man enjoys five types of possessions — the heart, the brain, the physique, the movable and the immovable property, which act as store-houses of love, wisdom, bodily labour, wealth and land. There are very few in this world who command all these at a time but there is none, howsoever placed in life, who may command none of them — even the disabled have a heart which can work wonders. Consequently, Vinoba calls upon his countrymen to come forward and offer either one or more of the five *Dans* in the great *Yagna—Prem Dan* ( प्रेमदान or love gift ), *Buddhi Dan* ( बुद्धिदान or wisdom gift ), *Shram Dan* ( श्रमदान or labour gift ), *Sampatti Dan* ( सम्पत्तिदान or wealth gift ) and *Bhoodan* ( भूदान or land gift ).

*Prem Dan* is purely human and moral requiring one 'to love thy neighbour as thyself'. Through *Buddhi Dan,* those who are intellectually equipped but neither own much wealth nor can do hard physical labour, can devote some of their time daily to help others by their knowledge or wisdom — the judges and lawyers can prevail upon the contending parties to settle their disputes amicably, the lawyers can fight the right cause without any fee, the doctors can allot a particular time to treat patients free, the teachers can teach without any remuneration, the accountants can give their time to public institutions, etc. In short, the intellectuals or brain workers can easily perform labour of love for the good of others.

*Shram Dan* is meant for those of sound physique, the usual labouring class. Though poor, they can help their poorer brethren by rendering some effective service to them. *Sampatti Dan* concerns the wealthy and the rich who hold the reins of economic power in their hands. Nay, it calls upon even the ordinary wage–earner or the street–hawker to submit a portion of his income, be it ever so little, for the welfare of the general mass. But Vinoba began with and concentrated on Bhoodan. For, to quote his own words :

> " The land problem was a basic one and I saw that unless something was done to meet it, it might develop into a big danger detrimental to the security of the nation. I, therefore, thought it fit first to concentrate my energy only on that question. Besides, in case of land, all could easily see that it was the direct gift of God. Again, it is the basic factor in the production of wealth. This was another reason why, in the beginning, I preferred to limit myself to the land problem alone. Moreover, to proceed step by step was also in keeping with the technique of *Ahmisa*."

No more can and should land remain in personal hands. The time has come when land wants to sweep away the barriers of individual ownership and flow freely carrying its rich gifts to the entire society. Vinoba wants this consummation to be brought about smoothly and peacefully. He seeks to persuade the landholder to read the signs of the times, do the needful, unload his crushing burden and establish a permanent relationship with the less privileged. He refuses to believe that a landlord or zamindar is of a different species requiring some extraordinary treatment. Vinoba is confident that if properly approached ' without the least trace of ego ', he would respond to the call. Vinoba tells us :

> " A man's heart, we must understand, is always good at the core. It may get rusted on the outside on account of various internal factors but its goodness remains always the same, whatever the outward appearance. It is like the head of a cabbage whose

outer layer may be so bad but the inside layers retain their freshness. The workers should have firm faith in this internal goodness and strive to reach for it undismayed by the outward appearances. "

Again, the landholders will willingly part with their land for they are intelligent people. The British left India because they felt that their continued stay would endanger their economic interests. The Rajahs and Maharajas agreed to the merger because they felt that their very existence was in jeopardy. So also the landlords and zamindars have begun to feel that, come what may, they cannot retain land. In this background, an approach to them is bound to bear fruit. They may take time, their own time. But not much time. As Vinoba recently remarked :

> " A friend has said that big zamindars and landholders were not giving due portions of their land. This is true. But on our part we will not be satisfied until they do so. We are going about our work at present rather gently. This may not do when the time arrives for the final solution of the question. Then we may have to change our technique and tune it to a stronger key. We should, therefore, be mentally prepared for it. "

The cordiality with which the country has received the Bhoodan Yagna movement justifies Vinoba's technique and approach. He is moving towards his goal from two directions concurrently. To quote him :

> " First we rely on the indwelling Godhead waking up sooner or later and impelling the individual to take the right path. Secondly, we are striving to create conditions to bring such an awakening that people will feel compelled to give. Thus we are trying to produce a double awakening, a moral awakening resulting in the change of heart and an awakening of the people's consciousness. If there is only an awakening of the people's consciousness and no moral awakening, it may create the force of

violence. On the other hand if there is only a moral awakening, it will take a very long time to achieve our objective. Just as a bird has two wings and must needs use both in order to fly, even so a righteous idea requires both the inner awakening and outer change in objective conditions."

As we have seen ( page 81 ), Vinoba called it *Dharma Chakra Pravartan* in his speech at Lucknow in May, 1952. A year later at Nagpheni in Ranchi district, Vinoba further elucidated it :

" We could not fight the British with arms because we had no arms and the British were infinitely superior to us in arms. The conditions thus demanded a recourse to some other weapon than the force of arms. While Gandhiji was convinced of the superior efficacy of *Ahimsa*, his task was made easier by the suitability of the conditions, and thus he succeeded in communicating his belief in *Ahimsa* to the entire nation and winning Swaraj. Similarly, to-day the poor throughout India—not only India but also throughout Asia—are hungry for land. And they will not rest until this hunger is satisfied. We have linked up this situation with the moral principle enjoined by *Dharma* that the landholder must give land to his hungry neighbour, for land is a gift of God and must, therefore, be deemed as a common property of the society. People could hardly have appreciated this idea in olden times, but now they have no difficulty in accepting it, since it has been linked up with the demand of the age. This combination of the right conditions and a moral idea generates tremendous force and leads to what I have called *Dharma Chakra Pravartan*."

When Vinoba asserts that *All Land Belongs* to *Gopal*, he wants to stop the sale and purchase of land for all time. In fact his is to restore,—in the light of new experience and in a form relevant to the age and responsive to its needs—the

old practice of land being treated as mother, *Dhartimata*. A historian has said : 'What had once been held rigid by custom was dissolved by money.' Vinoba proposes to undo this wrong and invest the ownership of land with the society or the village as such. In simple language it comes to : *Khet gaon ka, Kheti kisan ki* ( the land or field to belong to the village while cultivation to the cultivator ).

When the land is of the village, only he or she who works at it would reap its harvest. Thus the means of production would remain with the producer and not with anybody else, be he the absentee landlord or non-cultivating zamindar. This would mean a world of difference from the present position in which the means of production lie with the non-producer while the producer is denied all facilities. Let every producer in India obtain the means of production, problems like those of food and unemployment would die out as does darkness on the appearance of the sun. It is why Vinoba wants the landless to be provided with land to work. He wants every producer to be supplied with tools and material of production.

But as Vinoba has often said, Bhoodan alone will not bring the village into its own. In truth, if land redistribution were the only objective of this movement it would have collapsed long ago for it would then have enabled those who own means of production to get a tighter control over our village produce and exploit the poor man to the very bone and reduce the country to a colony of a handful of rich persons. Decentralisation of political as well as economic power is the essence of the movement. Nay, it strives at setting up decentralised self–sufficient units in which the villagers would decide their fate themselves. Says Vinoba :

> " Collections of land gifts is the least part of the work of Bhoodan Yagna. The main part of the work comes after that. The land collected will have to be distributed. Thus those who receive land will have to be provided with the wherewithal, so that they may start work, *i.e.*, they will have to be securely settled on the land. Then in the villages

where land is received we will have to work for the establishment of *Gram Raj* with Khadi, village industries, *Nai Talim*, etc."

Thus Bhoodan and Khadi or village industries have to go together so that our villages may become self-sufficient and self-reliant. But first things first and hence Vinoba's insistence on Bhoodan first. His is an attempt to awaken the Indian mass to its inner good sense, to make it cast off its unnatural shackles that have reduced it to a slave in its own household, and to realise the immense potentialities of its at once fearless and self-contained labours. As one who has harmed none and who has dreamt no dream that lay unrealised, Vinoba is eminently fitted to make this prayer on behalf of the forlorn and the neglected. This is the call of the new age in free India. In the immortal words of our poet :

"The famished, the homeless
raise their hands towards heaven,
and utter the name of God.

"Their call will never be in vain
in the land where God's response
comes through the heart of man
in heroic service and love."

## CHAPTER XIV

# IN THE NAME OF JAN-SHAKTI

Once upon a time man believed in and observed no barriers. He was a savage given to the beastly tradition of plunder and bloodshed. As he marched from savagery to civilization, he grew more tolerant and sympathetic towards his fellow-beings. In course of time he founded certain units, *viz.*, family, society, and nation, to meet his temporal longings, and for the satisfaction of his higher yearnings he developed the taste for caste or creed and religion. And customs came into force in keeping with the general social habits and characteristics. Later with the evolution of political or administrative units these social customs took the form of laws or legal enactments governing the day to day activities. This gradual progress of man from the law of the jungle to that of the legislature has been the handmaid of the trend of mass consciousness as it rose from one stage to another. Legal force has thus become an over-riding force in our society and breach of laws is regarded as a crime.

From the law of a country, as a symbol of the inclination and practice of the average man, can be gathered the normal traits of the general social life in that country. But law has its limitations. Should a Government in some country enact an ordinance that smoking is a crime, the law would remain a dead letter. Again, if that Government were to pass another ordinance permitting people to steal or loot, this law also would meet the same fate. Because, in both cases the Government would be transgressing its bounds in disregarding the normal code of life lived by the governed. In the former case, as an average man smokes and society finds nothing wrong in it, no law can condemn this practice. In the latter case, as an average man does not steal or loot and society decries it as evil, no law can make it an honourable calling or conduct. The two ordinances can become a living order of the day only after the general mass has shown by its behaviour

that, in the first case, it has abstained from smoking and that, in the second case, it has, God forbid, taken to stealing or looting. And this behaviour would be an outcome of the thought and activity of some, above the average, seers or persons, who are joined and followed by others till it becomes an established affair. The law would, therefore, act as a seal marking, as Vinoba says, words '*The End*' to a book whose pages have been already written.

The seal signifies the close of the chapters. It helps a normal reader to deal with that book and leaves him in no doubt about it. But there are cases when the seal may not be marked at all or be marked long before the pages reach the finish. To take examples from our own country. There is no law prohibiting a Hindu from eating beef or a Muslim from pork. But they do not, for society has condemned it in unequivocal and bold words for all time. Next, there is a law in our constitution stopping none, be he a Harijan or an untouchable, from entering a temple and performing the religious rites. Yet when a person of Vinoba's eminence entered a temple together with some Harijans, he was maltreated, even beaten, in the name of *Dharma*. He was beaten simply because society has not yet declared untouchability a crime as it has done in the case of beef or pork. Thus a law which pretends to outrun mass feelings or character is bound to prove in vain. To take another example. There is a law prohibiting child-marriages. Yet such marriages go on. Of course their number is getting less, not because of the law but because of the general attitude or conduct of the people.

Let us examine in this light why Vinoba invokes *Jan-shakti* ( जनशक्ति ) rather than take recourse to law for a fulfillment of the Bhoodan Yagna programme. As things stand today, land is a marketable commodity, held out for sale or mortgage etc. No stroke of pen of any authority, howsoever mighty, can stop this practice in a single night. As we have seen, legislation, being the indirect expression of the normal code of behaviour of a people, cannot suddenly impose upon the people something new and unheard of. It can only follow its combined will; it cannot steal a march over it. Sometimes

as in the case of franchise for English women the law came long after, though public opinion was favourable in advance. Nevertheless, Vinoba does not preclude any Government, State or Central, from passing an Act to provide land to the landless.

An Act, however, may not necessarily serve the desired purpose. In the parliamentary system and its *attaché*, the legal system, in vogue in our country today, legislature, a coarse replica of the British model, gives rise to more differences and dissensions. The Zamindari-Abolition Act of U. P. is a case in point. It did pocket big zamindars' land and granted, subject to certain conditions, land ownerships to some farmers. But it could not restore land to the landless. Nay it was responsible for the destruction of many gardens (at zamindars' own hands!) and created more troubles for the poor tiller. What is worse, it gave rise to a huge amount of litigation and bad blood. On the other hand, the Bhoodan movement in Bihar has led to a great fall in litigation. Another illustration is the recent enactment of the Bombay Government about the teaching of English. The matter has gone to the court and what was proposed to be smoothly carried out has been stained with ill-feelings. In substance, legislation leads to tearing of hearts, separating one man from another. It miserably fails to unite them. That can happen only when the atmosphere is ready for it and the general mass has adopted that code as its own.

Besides, legislation can only limit the quantity of land a man may own, *i. e.*, it can fix a ceiling and distribute the land so obtained to the landless. But if the landlord, as has been done at several places in anticipation of this development, divides his land into bits equal to that ceiling, gets them registered in the name of his different relatives or near ones, law cannot stop him. It is quite likely that if a ceiling, say of 30 acres of wet land, were fixed in Bihar, no land may be left for the landless! At any rate the land so left would be of the most inferior quality. Thus through legislation the landless would get, if at all, the 'worst selected' land!

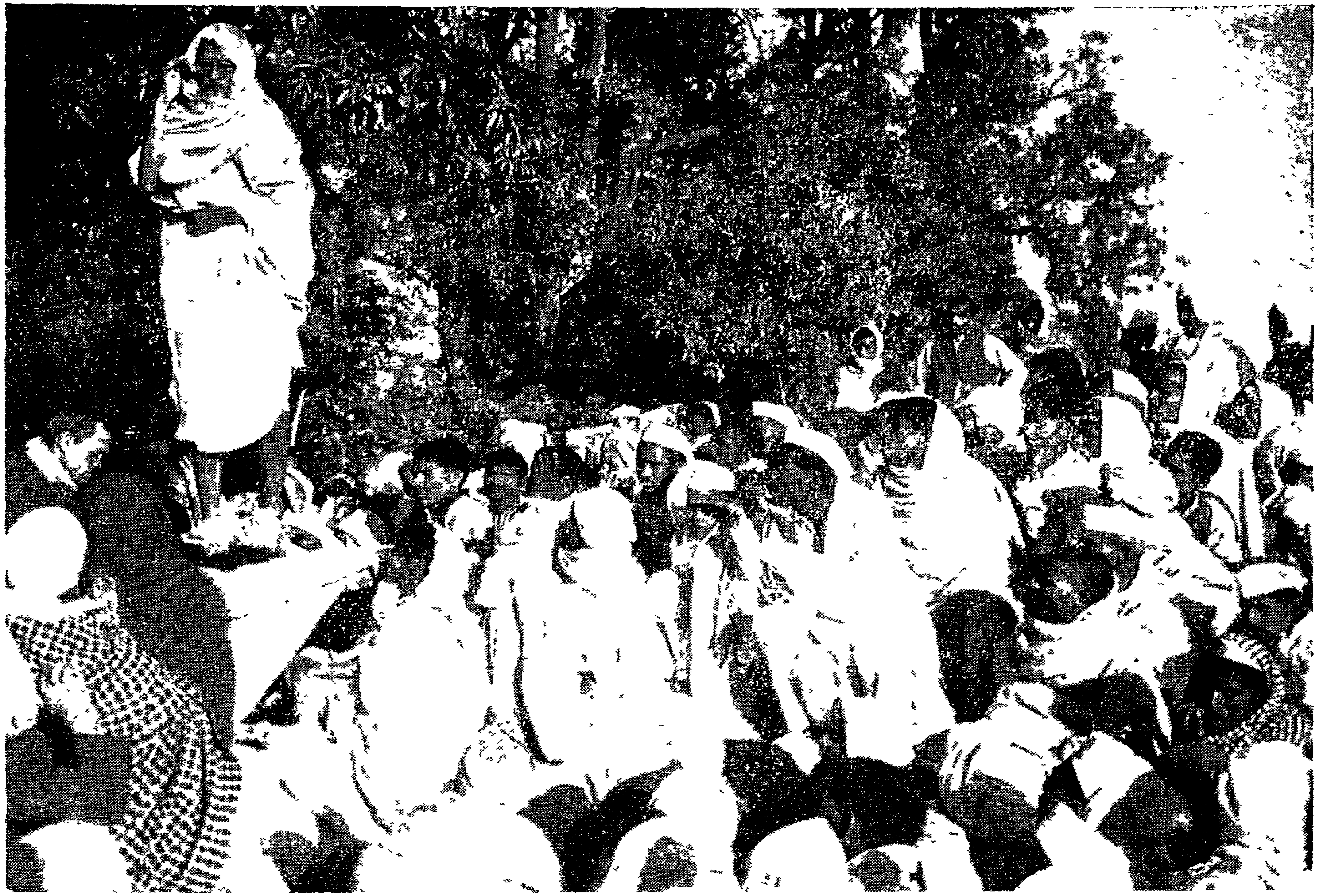
Another difficulty in the same connection is about comp-

ensation. For providing land to the landless, the Government must acquire it from the landowners. As required by the constitution of India, the Government would have to pay them compensation for this acquisition. It means a further strain on the public exchequer and drain on the wherewithals of the poor. For the Government cannot pay it from vacuum, its only source is the rent or tax-paying public. Thus the real burden of compensation would ultimately fall on the landless. It virtually amounts to robbing the landless further still.

Granted for the moment, however, that legislation will transfer land to the landless. But that is only a part of the whole problem. For the issue is not merely to provide land to the tiller but to close the trade in land for all time. Significantly enough, Vinoba's movement is not *Bhoodan* but *Bhoodan Yagna*. He does not merely want a transfer of land from one hand to another but wants to inculcate in all of us a permanent taste for giving our best unto the society for universal good. Legislation cannot achieve either of the two ends. Bound as it is by a constitution which permits private property, it cannot make land unmarketable. Nor can it call upon an individual to part with it necessarily. No law can make a widow part with two acres out of her twelve acres for her poorer brethren : the law of love operating through Bhoodan Yagna can. Vinoba's objective is not land procurement and distribution but giving a happy turn, a new tone to the disposition of man.

Be as it may, a question poses itself : Why seek the shelter of legislation ? Why should law be a pre-requisite of what must needs be done ? If a thing stands on its own merit it should not require support from without. Further, if man is prepared to obey law, why should he not respond to the higher law—the call of love ? As Vinoba says :

> " What is legislation ? It is but the will of the people expressed through their elected representatives. If then they will submit to the rule of law which they themselves bring into being, why would they not submit to the rule of the divine law—the



" I have become the horse of Bhoodan Yagna "

law of love of which we have recurring experience in our life ?

"Man is born through love, he grows through love, he thirsts for it in his last moments and feels supremely comforted when he gets it. If, therefore, his entire life, in its beginning, the middle and the end, depends upon love, if that is for him the source of his greatest delight, why would he not feel prompted to participate in the Bhoodan and *Sampattidan* which are but an aspect of this all-embracing law of love, and give to his poorer brethren a due share of what he has in land or wealth ?"

Vinoba further opines :

"Let those who advocate legislation ponder over this question. For my part, I am convinced that if law which is at the most an indirect expression of man's will can work, his direct will as expressed in love must work better, more quickly and more easily. Those who share in this fundamental faith will not be troubled by doubt. And I hold that if we would but make the society see the truth of this belief, it will certainly respond and co-operate with us in our endeavour. The belief is already there rooted in man. If it were not so, no force, howsoever violent, can avail us in making him see it. But in his heart of heart man knows it; we have only got to explain it to him and he will begin to see it. As it is, people have given within this short period more land than I had expected."

We have thus seen that on account of its inherent limitations, legislation, except when resorted to in the end, cannot succeed in securing justice, not legal justice but God's justice. Legal justice fragments hearts, creates disruption and countenances evil, while God's or moral justice resuscitates hearts, begets harmony and encourages virtue. A Government cannot go beyond a certain stage, specially when there is a question of bringing about fundamental changes in social or economic values. As Vinoba once observed :

"The Government cannot do much in this task. The Government is after all only a bucket, while the people are like a well. If there is no water in the well, how can there be any in the bucket? We will therefore go to the source of water—the people. What the Government cannot do, the people can."

It is why Vinoba seeks to build up, what he calls स्वतंत्र जनशक्ति or the self-reliant power of the people—a power which is opposed to the force of violence and different from the authority of the State. Pointing out the characteristics of this power, Vinoba said at Chandil :

"The power of the people is the opposite of the power of violence, and though there is no such trenchant opposition between the power of the people and the power of the State, yet the two are different.. We, however, intend to go further ahead of it and create conditions which will do away with the need to use even the power of the State. Then only could it be said of us that we have realised our स्वधर्म (or essential duty) and done it. On the contrary, if we go after political power in the mistaken belief that it is the only way to serve the people, we will not be fit to fulfil the expectations people have of us but may also prove a burden to them."

To build up *Jan-Shakti*–the forging of the sanction of the enlightened masses, Vinoba proposes two methods of procedure, *Vichar-shasan*, or peaceful conversion of people to our view by making them think about it, and *Kartritva-vibhajan* or distribution of work among the individuals without creating an administrative authority. * Hence the need to approach the masses and engage in sincere active service.

Besides, *Jan-Shakti* is the *sine qua non* for advancing towards a classless and casteless, exploitation-free and freedom-loving society, nay also for political power itself. Suppose for the moment that Vinoba approaches the Government. It may

* Please see also page 107.

or may not listen to him. But most likely, under the present constitutional and politico-economic conditions, it will not. For, who is not aware of the fact that all urges and appeals against Vanaspati by so noble and selfless a soul as K. G. Mashruwala proved in vain and the Government did not move an inch ? Why ? Because no Government is moved but by solid actions and popular strength. Obviously we should, if at all, urge upon the Government only when we are strong enough to change the Government's 'No' into a people's ' Yes ', *i. e.*, to stand against its refusal. And we cannot stand until we have self-confidence and public backing which has to be secured by loosing oneself in the people and creating *Jan-Shakti* thereby. Bhoodan Yagna provides us the medium through which masses can be served and contacted and *Jan-Shakti* generated. This is how the movement opens up scores of avenues for a political and economic shake-up of the country and gives us all an opportunity to rebuild the devastated India anew.

CHAPTER XV

# SAMPATTIDAN YAGNA

Science and invention have turned this earth into a small town provided with easy and quick means of approach and commerce. Also a very large number amongst us enjoys the benefits of democracy, republican, crowned, socialist or the like. This democracy confers upon its citizens a right to vote — one vote for every head — whereby he or she can choose the assembly of those who would direct and control the internal and external policies and affairs of the State. In other words, the common man is the king-maker of today. Yet he does not seem to be happy and satisfied. Often, he, the king-maker is used as cannon-fodder in a war, he has to submit himself to a system which makes him its tool, and he finds before him people who flaunt themselves as lords and potentates while he is denied his due job or square meal. In fine, the common man holds power in the political sphere while in the socio-economic one he does not count, which is a basic contradiction in the 'democracy' of the world today. It has resulted in reducing the common man to an automaton dancing to the tune of the few at the top controlling the reins of industry and trade. The interests of these few despots, administrators-cum-financiers, guide the affairs of the State, the common man being given no place in the picture. Consequently, the common man remains unemployed or under-employed and hungry with no amenities of life. These chieftains own the resources of production and wealth scattered in different parts of the globe, exploit them as also the common man, and go on adding 'golden numbers to golden numbers'. This accounts for the galling economic disparities in democracies, our India not excluded, which have well-nigh turned them, as it were, into pleasant hunting grounds for the privileged few.

A clash of the interests of these economic over-lords —their search for depots of raw material or markets for

finished goods — keeps the world equilibrium disturbed. When the disturbance assumes an active form it is war—hot war, and when a passive one it is peace—cold war. There is always war, war in war and war in peace, so called 'peace', and real peace—an easing of tensions—is conspicuous by its absence. The sufferer is the common man, though the boss above is no less unhappy for he knows no satiation and his appetite for having more, for appropriation, is never satisfied. In fact, appropriation is the principal pivot on which revolves the merry-go-round called democracy. Whence greed and possession are the order of the day, the ruling principle the world over. Nay, as Vinoba once remarked :

> "What is more, an imposing legal frame-work has been raised around it giving it a look of respectability, and therefore it does not strike one as wrong. We consider stealing to be a crime, but connive at those who encourage this anti-social activity by amassing heaps of money. In a story in a Upanishad a king says: 'In my kingdom, there is neither a thief nor a miser.' As we know it is the miser who gives rise to the thief. We condemn the thieves to rot in the prison-house, but let their creators roam about in complete freedom. They even occupy seats of honour and respectability in the society. Is this justice ?"

To continue :

> "The highly expensive administrative and other departments of the Government are known as 'services'. And there are services galore: Civil Service, Medical Service, Educational Service. The officials of the Civil Service are paid four figure salaries, while their masters, the poor of the country, whom they profess to serve have to live on a pittance of annas eight a day. It is a tragic paradox that those who earn lakhs are called servants, while those who produce food for the nation are regarded as self-seekers working merely to feather their own nest.

What one is to say of these 'services'? If words are not to be deprived of their meaning, then this is nothing, but cant and hypocrisy."

The question facing India and the world today is : What is the way out of this hypocrisy ? Needless to state that if this persists, economic and social antagonism and discord would be aggravated and humanity would fast recede to the cannibalistic stage, if not worse. But there is no problem too stiff for man to solve. The said hypocrisy can be successfully met with. How ? Here is Vinoba's solution :

"It is in order to put an end to this hypocrisy that I have put forward the idea of land being the common property of all. All that we have, our land and property and intelligence; everything has to be an offering to the society.

"To-day he who earns money, does also earn worry. Though he may make money, he loses something more precious than money, *viz.*, the love of his fellow-men, the love of friends and neighbours. That is why even the moneyed are unhappy in the existing society. Both the rich and the poor are unhappy. The remedy is to change the order and place it on the secure basis of non-possession."

Through his *Sampattidan Yagna*, Vinoba paves the way for all to free themselves from the tyranny of possession and sublimate their appetite for belongings. He has found a concrete formula to give Gandhiji's 'trusteeship' idea a practical shape. Vinoba asks all who possess money or property—in fact, all who earn their livelihood—to renounce ownership of what they have and in witness thereof part regularly with a portion of it—preferably one-sixth, if not more—for the society. Thereby he, restressing the dignity of labour, makes it incumbent upon all to perform productive physical work as a part of their life-routine.

*Sampattidan Yagna* is certainly no fund or a common pool where all may deposit their quotas. It is not simply

*Sampatti-dan* but *Sampattidan Yagna*, whence it becomes a religious duty applicable to all without exception and has a universal character in that nobody can escape it.

As evident from the *Sampattidan Yagna* pledge *, the characteristics of this *Yagna* are :

(i) The donor has to donate a certain percentage of his income or expenditure throughout his life, or at least for five years to begin with ;

(ii) Money would remain with the donor himself ;

(iii) He would spend it in such a manner as Vinoba may desire him to ;

(iv) He would maintain an account of the money spent and submit the same regularly to Vinoba or his nominee.

The basic tenet of *Sampattidan Yagna* is : 'All property is His', as immortalised by Tulsidas in the words, '*Sampatti sab Raghupati ki ahi*' ( All wealth belongs to God ). The idea is that all wealth, even though we may acquire it with our individual effort and skill, is not for us alone but has been granted to us by God for all of us. The energy and initiative which went into the making of this wealth are themselves a gift of God. It is easy to see that *Sampattidan* goes far ahead of Bhoodan. In the latter, the donor's task is over the moment he donates land ; in the former, he has not only to donate his wealth regularly but he has also to manage it himself. As Vinoba aptly says, the latter corresponds to giving one's daughter in marriage, the former to involving oneself in wedlock ! Thus *while Bhoodan relieves, Sampatti-dan binds. But it binds only to release.*

Based on the idea of non-possession, or possession on behalf of and for others, *Sampattidan Yagna* seeks to make the rich or the poor shed off their sense of ownership and share their richness or poverty together and draw each according to his need from the bank contained in every home.

* See Appendix

It thus bids fair to eliminate richness and poverty by merger of the rich and the poor and create a समरस or classless society commanding colossal collective strength or जनशक्ति which, if properly yoked, could tackle the most Herculean task and make the world a much better place to live in. In Vinoba's words :

"There is one thing which we will demonstrate through Sampattidan : that non-possession is a force for social good. We have long known that non-possession brings about individual purification. We have to realize that it can also serve as a powerful means of social wellbeing. We have to prove that it is not only spiritually efficacious but it can help us in constructing better and richer worldly life. The Gandhi Memorial Fund collected ten crore rupees. But not even hundred crores will suffice for all we want to do. The need of the hour is to mobilize all our wealth in every form and press it into the service of the society. The *Sampattidan* way will turn every house into a bank on which the society can draw freely for all its wants. And because what is offered will be used locally, it will make a very easily workable plan. It will directly lead to the building up of the collective strength of the people. It will unite them with one another and release tremendous energy for constructive effort. We know that practice of equality and renunciation are good, but we have to look at them afresh and see them as forces for promoting social welfare."

Visualising a non-possessing social order, Vinoba once observed :

"When people get so far prepared as to offer their all to society, we will build up a Government which will not need to seek help from America, nor the paper-money from the Nasik Press. Every Indian home will be its bank. People will readily comply with whatever demand it may choose to make on

them. People will leave all their worries to the care of society and be themselves free from any worry or insecurity."

Note, every home is to be a bank. In *Sampattidan*, therefore, are also contained the seeds to overhaul and change the present economic order and the financial system as in vogue in the 'civilized' world today. Currency and finance, banking and insurance, stock exchange and money market, taxation and tarriff, customs and duties, levies and cesses, export and import—all of which are but subtle devices and manipulation of the various economic oligarchies to divert people's capital and resources of production and distribution unto themselves at the cost of the common man—would thereafter undergo a complete metamorphosis and instead of being the instruments of exploitation that they are today would act as veins and arteries for the right circulation of life-blood in the body-politic of the nation. The motive for private profit eliminated and money displaced from the unnaturally high pedestal it occupies to-day, the being of man would blossom forth with a hue and fragrance that would impart an altogether new zest and comprehension to life.

Transformation of individual virtues into social forces has been a consistent feature in the progress of man. Once upon a time people took away each other's goods and thieving was in the air. But man gradually felt that that was no good for its extension would make life impossible. He, therefore, declared stealing a sin. Non-stealing is ever since an honoured code of society. Vinoba desires to proceed one step onward and through the medium of *Sampattidan Yagna* and allied *Yagnas*, he wants to inculcate in the society the idea that like stealing, excess or more of collection is also sinful. Going from door to door, he is preaching and explaining this mission of his.

Fortunately, the idea of world-as-one-family (वसुधैव-कुटुम्बकम् *Vasudheva Kutumbkam*) was taught by our ancient Rishis. But we could not give it a practical shape. It remained

confined in the grooves of thought. Hence collection or accumulation found a place in our society. In course of time it gave rise to inequalities and disparities and the present awful situation when a vast gulf separates the rich from the poor. All this collection is a result of exploitation of the labour of the poor. But if we begin to regard the whole village as one family and take to non-collection and productive labour, disparity will thin out, exploitation disappear and all would be happy. No doubt the poor man is unhappy today. But the rich are no less miserable. The latter do not completely trust their own children and keep their keys tied to their *janeu*, sacred thread. This begets distrust and thieving. Thus the entire society is cut into shreds and man knows no peace. A progressive adherence to the non-accumulation and productive-labour practice is the only practical way out.

It may be pertinently asked : Why this hit at private property at all ? As one proceeds to answer it a poser raises itself: What is 'private' with us, the mortals of this earth ? Even the body which we own is not ours; for there comes a time when we cannot bear it ourselves and at least four others, if not more, are required to carry it for the last rites. No sooner we are born than we get others—the mother, the home, the society, all showering their blessings and love and affection on us. There is nothing which we can acquire by sheer 'private' effort. We are obliged to the society for what we may be. What we have is due to the society. What we are is due to the society. The society, therefore, has insistent and constant claims upon us. These claims must be honestly met. Whetever we may keep with 'us' should be honoured as a trust handed to us by the owner called society. It is the duty of the driver ( individual ) to so drive the car ( of life ) that the owner ( society ) may not suffer thereof.

With a richly endowed imagination, Vinoba, through the medium of *Sampattidan Yagna*, woos our consent ( but not compels ) in order that we may come out of our self-sought bondage lying in our dependence on external possessions and thus obliterate fearsome disparities in the society today. He

first mentioned the word *Sampattidan* at Patna in October 1952. As he said at Chandil :

> " Along with the Bhoodan work, I have recently launched on another programme — the *Sampattidan Yagna*. It is necessary for the fulfillment of the Bhoodan Yagna. We cannot achieve our object of economic independence and economic equality unless we give effect to *Sampattidan*. I knew it from the beginning but I chose to follow the formula which says — ' Attend ye to the root, and all else will grow automatically.' The land problem was more fundamental than any other. So we carried on only Bhoodan Yagna and that still remains our main occupation. But when I came to Bihar and we decided to solve the land-problem of this province on a big scale I felt that it was now time to start the *Sampattidan Yagna*. "

On the occasion of his second visit to Patna in January last, he appealed to its citizens to donate their share in it. It is with the help of the twin programme of Bhoodan and *Sampattidan* that India can secure economic independence and fight out capitalism to a finish. Capitalism, as well known, ultimately thrives on the market. Slowly and steadily, the foreign capitalist, in league with his little brother the indigenous capitalist, is trying to capture the Indian village market entirely. In his anxiety to earn more profit the capitalist seems to ignore the woes and sorrows of the village-people. But this incursion would be met and met on two fronts—firstly, raising the village structure on decentralised self-sufficient lines; secondly, prevailing upon the rich people and big businessmen to contribute their due mite in the *Sampattidan Yagna*, do physical labour themselves, treat themselves as a trustee of their industry or business and share it equally with all ' hands '. The major and potential weapon in this struggle would be, what Vinoba calls, right thought. Once when asked : ' How will capitalism be ended ? ', Vinoba replied :

> " Capitalism cannot be ended either by love or

> conflict, but by right thought. Conflict leads to ever more conflict which can only weaken both, while love also cannot bring about a change of things. Love brings forth enthusiasm, but only right thought can initiate and effect a revolution. That is why we do not beg for gifts, but demand a share to which the poor are rightfully entitled. We want the people to understand and accept the idea that in a just and equitable order of society, land must belong to all. We rely more than anything else on the force of this thought for furthering our cause. And yet if the conflict becomes necessary, we will not avoid it. Conflict is also one of the factors of progress, but essentially it is ill-qualified to bring about a revolution."

It is how the *Sampattidan Yagna* movement proposes to challenge capitalism. Nay it seeks to challenge the very position which capital enjoys today. In sober fact, capital is an extremely cunning mistress. In a very subtle manner it shifts its favours from an individual to a group or party and continues to be on the top. In the *Sampattidan* scheme of things, capital cannot be allowed to occupy a position more elevated than it deserves. Man would be the supreme arbiter and decide, according to the exigencies of the situation, the status to be given to capital as also to machine. In other words, here is an attempt to end capitalism by attacking it at the very root and build a new society. It would not be a *classless* society in which one group or party would dominate the rest, but a *one-class* (एकवर्ग) society in which there would be no superior group or party controlling the reins of administration and yet also doing no productive labour itself. In this society, call it Sarvodaya society for want of a better name, everybody who eats would be enjoined to do productive physical labour. All who eat would work and all who work would eat. Each would work according to his or her capacity and get according to his or her need.

The task is certainly difficult and unprecedented. One

can only go step by step towards this objective. But go one must and never rest. Not long ago Vinoba declared :

> "My first step was Bhoodan, next is the *Sampatti-dan*, *i. e.*, donation of property. I will take a third step which will be nothing less than surrender of everything in the interest of the poor, the acceptance of poverty that all may equally partake of God's good riches."

CHAPTER XVI

# ESTABLISHING GRAM–RAJ

The urge of the Indian people for political freedom and their resolve to break away from the British empire was voiced in 1906 by Dadabhai Naoroji through the word '*Swaraj*'. Later came Lokmanya Tilak who thundered : '*Swaraj* is my birth right and I would have it.' Perhaps Tilak Maharaj was also the first man in our history who identified God with the masses and recognised Him in the form of *Janata–atma* (जनतात्मा, soul of the people). Gandhiji, taking the next natural step, pointed the way to attain the cherished target of '*Swaraj*' and worshipped God as *Daridranarayan*, met with among the poorest and lowliest of the land. Consequently he gave to the nation, what he called, 'constructive programme' which he defined as the 'non–violent and truthful way of winning *Poorna Swaraj*'. He claimed that its wholesale fulfillment meant complete independence.

For the execution of his constructive programme Gandhiji gave the stirring call : 'Back to the villages.' Scores of constructive workers responded to it and lost themselves in the wilderness of the village. Yet strange as it now (in 1954) seems, the face of the village could not be altered. It remained very much the same. Nay, even sufficient co-operation and goodwill of the villager could not be obtained. Whatever the worker might do in a village—cleaning drains and heaps, teaching children, spinning yarn or weaving it, treating the sick or disabled, etc., etc.—the villager did not feel much concerned. Looking from this distance of time it appears that *Gram-Seva* (ग्रामसेवा, village service) we did but not *Gramin-Seva* (ग्रामीण सेवा, villagers' service). We did not join the villager in his weal and woe and kept ourselves rather aloof from villager's daily life, his sorrows and sufferings. Honestly, it could not be helped. For, there was the alien rule which smelt something dangerous in our innocent

programme. Nevertheless, it cannot be gainsaid that the constructive worker could not merge himself into the villager, nor goad or inspire the latter to any lively activity. Nay, we stood a helpless witness to the uninterrupted drain of our villages by cities and a continuous decline of village industries and cottage crafts.

Perhaps all this was inevitable as the main object then in view was to get rid of the foreign ruler and obtain *Swaraj.* Gandhiji defined it as follows :

> " By political independence I do not mean an imitation of the British House of Commons or the Soviet rule of Russia or the Fascist rule of Italy or the Nazi rule of Germany. They have systems suited to their genius. We must have ours suited to ours. What that can be is more than I can tell. I have described it as *Ram Raj*, *i. e.*, sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. "

In his individual capacity, Gandhiji worked for *Ram Raj* and working gloriously for the same until his last breath he passed away. But, as he said in 1921, his " corporate activity was undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary Swaraj, in accordance with the wishes of the people of India. " On August 15, 1947, the said Parliamentary Swaraj was obtained. But the sovereignty of the people, living in millions in the villages, could not be and has not yet been established. On the contrary, a group of about half a dozen persons, viewing from the eminence of their prosperity in New Delhi, are appointed to 'plan', on behalf of the Government, for the whole country, which the Government seeks to impose all over. It signifies a yet greater denial of freedom and severeignty to the villager to build themselves as they think best. The result is that the evil system which seized our villages and village industries in its serpentine coil during the British rule is receiving every sustenance and nourishment, culminating in terrible unemployment, scarcity conditions and ruin. With a partiality for the rich and the possessing few, the Government, despite its good intentions,

is only crippling the interests of the vast millions and whittling down the latter's claim for justice and fairplay. Vinoba has given utterance to the aspirations of the masses in the word *Gram Raj.*

We have *Swaraj* alright. But verily it is *Dilli-Raj* or *Dilli–Bombay Raj* in which the village hardly finds any appreciable notice. Vinoba defines *Gram Raj* as one in which :

( i ) Power is decentralised from village to village;

( ii ) Land, wealth and property are under common ownership; and

(iii) There is no distinction in the matter of salaries, wages, etc.

Dilating upon it in his post–prayer speech at a village in Bhagalpur district in October last, Vinoba observed:

> " Today we are busy in national planning. In fact we require village planning. People of the village should exercise their own brain to do things. Should somebody err only one village would suffer. But when the stewardship of the whole country is entrusted to four or five persons the whole country has to suffer the consequence of their one single mistake. But this will not be so when power resides in the village itself. If one village commits a certain blunder another would not repeat it. Hence power should be distributed in every village. There must be decentralisation of power like the one set up by God."

Regarding the second point he said :

> " Another essential requisite of a *Gram Raj* structure is that all land, all property and all wealth should belong to the society. Only Vishnu can be the lord of Lakshmi. But to–day we aggrandise ourselves as her lord. I feel this is injustice, denial of religion. What I want to inculcate among the

people is that our body is made from and out of the society and for the service of the society. Service is thus a debt on our shoulders which we have to repay. We are distinct from our body. So when we are not the owners or masters of even our body, how dare we claim our right on such other things as land and property ? If none has a claim on the *Ganga*, how can we have on land or property ? "

About the third he remarked :

" We have to build a society in which every calling is equally paid. Every calling has an importance of its own. That one work should be valued more than another is an injustice. It may be admitted that the responsibility implied in one work differs from that in another. But equal wages would have to be paid to all unless and until it is established that one with a greater responsibility feels more hungry than the one with a lesser responsibility. It is wrong to pay according to the responsibility involved in a work or its extent. "

Thereafter he declared in a solemn voice :

" With this aim in view I have introduced the lever of Bhoodan. Hence I go from village to village. People ask me why I would not apply 'pressure' over Government to frame law accordingly. Well, I am, in fact, not interested in it. What I am interested in is wiping the Government itself out and in the creation of a new society. I have resorted to the problem of land with this objective. "

Thus Bhoodan is the new medium to carry out constructive programme and establish *Gram Raj*. It has really provided such a life to constructive activities as nothing else had done. Bhoodan is not only *Gram-Seva* but also *Gramin-Seva*. With Bhoodan on his lips and a faith in the goodness of man in his heart, the constructive worker of today finds little

difficulty in entering the inner life of the villagers. They gather round him cheerfully, they listen to him avidly and respond to his request happily as also intelligently. We have already seen in earlier chapters what a huge response has been evoked by Bhoodan. It has encouraged local initiative and marked a new epoch in the era of constructive work.

Naturally, it is only now that the village people are going to adopt khadi, village industries or other items of constructive programme. They simply could not do it earlier. Bhoodan provides them with a base to build and stand upon. At several places in Bihar, I was personally assured by the villagers that they would now begin to take cultivation of cotton and oil-seeds and produce their cloth and oil themselves ! They did want to produce it but they could not, partly because of personal lethargy and partly because of the crushing money-centred economic order. Once land ceases to be a marketable commodity and they are provided with the means of production, they would begin to rely on themselves and depend on cities no more for their basic necessities. This would directly lead, in course of time, to the creation of decentralised units working as conscious elements of a non-violent state which will hardly need to exercise its authority over those units. We would then have village republics enjoying *Gram Raj.*

In this connection, Vinoba also offered some remarks at the Chandil Sarvodaya Sammelan :

> " The villagers must wake up to the realization of their duty and decide what things they will produce in the village and then ask the Government to ban the import of those things which thwart their efforts. If the Government does not come to their help, they should be bold enough to stand up against the Government. Such resistance by the people against the Government will be of great help to the latter because that would pave the way for doing away with the need for the military. "

He also explained that all this was to be done through

the building up of *Jana-Shakti*. Bhoodan Yagna is a part of his plan to train the people in the use of their intelligence and in shouldering their individual responsibilities in the social whole. Work on these lines has begun in villages like Mangroth whose people have donated their entire land in Bhoodan Yagna.

With the abolition of private ownership and elimination of grades in wages and services, the economic climate obtaining under *Gram Raj* would be very much different from that it is today. Social and economic disparities would be very much obliterated. There may not be absolute equality but there would also not be disproportionate inequality. There would be equity, even though fingers-like inequality. The various elements of the population would be working in full co-operation and performing innumerable tasks together.

In the new economic set-up, man would not look down upon physical work or labour. Nor would money be occupying the unnatural and overlording position of to-day. As Vinoba once said,

> "The rule should be that a man who wholeheartedly served the society should be entitled to his living wage. Likewise, the President of the country, who serves his country with equal zeal, though intellectually, should be given a wage sufficient for his living. The basis of payment to the President must be the same as that of the *Kisan* and the scavenger."

It is after bodily labour is given its respectable status that the system of education can be changed and a right one—in which the physical, mental and moral qualities of a child obtain a full opportunity for their wholesome development so that he or she may later render his or her best to the society, nation and the world—instituted in its place. The school would be just like a family meeting ground where, without any differences of high and low, all children would grow into youthful and useful citizens of the State.

Vinoba aptly calls khadi making tools, *viz.*, *takli* and *charkha* as वस्त्रपूर्णा ( Vastra-Poorna or supplying full cloth ) and

not अन्न पूर्णा (Anna-Poorna or supplying full meal.) It is cruel to expect of them to provide a whole meal. In fact, khadi-cloth should be produced at home rather than purchased. As people cook food at their homes, they should be able to prepare cloth. Together with food cultivation, cotton cultivation must also go on, which was the case during the eighteenth century and earlier or in the early part of the nineteenth century too.

This brings us to the question of home industry vis-a-vis village industry and to the larger question of the place of machinery in our life. At present spinning work is almost nowhere visible in our villages whereas weaving work, though in very rugged conditions, is carried on as a village industry. But there are several parts of our country, specially in Assam, Manipur, etc., where weaving is a home industry still. It shows that the same must have been the case at other places too at one time or another. Here the deciding factor would be that none remains idle and workless and that his or her personality finds full expression. Besides khadi, various other village industries would also be established, *e.g.*, paddy-husking and flour-grinding, oil-pressing, soap-making, tanning, shoe-making, paper, pottery, etc., etc.

As regards machinery, Vinoba observed :

"Machines are of three categories : time-saving, destructive and productive. I am not against time-saving machines, such as trains, aeroplanes etc. Though they do not add to the production of the country, they save time.

"Destructive machines such as gun, bomb, etc., have no place in non-violence. We are therefore opposed to them.

"Productive machines are again of two categories: those that are helpful and those that are harmful, depending upon time, place and circumstances in which they are used. A machine which might be harmful to one country may be helpful to another. A machine

which might be helpful at one time might be harmful at another time. So also with the changes in circumstances. No set formula can be laid down to judge whether a machine is harmful or helpful. We, therefore, have neither blind infatuation for machinery nor irrrational opposition to it. Service of man will be the sole test for acceptance or rejection of a machine."

Decentralisation would be the main technique both in economic and political affairs. Economic activities would be controlled through *panchayati* or co-operative institutions, the guiding principle being that all those finished goods which can be manufactured by the villages from out of the raw materials they produce, would be prepared in the villages themselves and the surplus quantity be sent to other villages and cities where the same may be required.

In the political set-up, *panchayat dharm* would be adhered to. In Vinoba's words :

> "The principle of a *panchayat* was: 'God speaks through the five,' *i.e.*, a unanimous decision of the *panchayat* was respected as the verdict of God. If three or four out of five gave one judgment and the others gave a different one, it could not be taken as the verdict of God. If it were not so, it would give rise to majority and minority distinctions. Therefore, the only way to achieve unity is to accept the principle of 'God speaks through the five', *i.e.*, to achieve the ideal of unanimous decision."

The people who would be guiding the administration, in one village or in the sub-divisional or district or higher units, would not be elected but unanimously chosen in the lower unit for the higher one. They would be replaceable according to the unanimous decision of the selecting unit. In fact, 'this body of servants', as Gandhiji said in his last will and testament to the nation, 'would derive their authority or power from service ungrudgingly and wisely done to their master, the whole of India.'

As regards defence, it is clear that a decentralised self-sufficient unit offers little or no greedy attraction to any outsider, if only the members of that unit are wide awake as also conscientious. This does not, however, preclude the question of defence in case of internal dissension or external aggression. Collective self-defence would be the principle. *Shanti Dal* ( or Peace Brigades ) would form the army and progressive non-violent non-co-operation would be the weapon in its artillery. Every village will have a unit of its own, contributing some members to the higher and some to highest units as well. Thus the central *Shanti Dal* would be a battalion of brave and fearless soldiers, adept in the art and science of non-violent non-co-operation, who would be prepared to lay down their lives for the cause. In fact, the executive of this central *Shanti Dal* would easily serve the purpose of the central administrative unit. As they would be in administration because of their efficient and superior services to the nation, they would also be the front-rankers to sacrifice themselves for the nation. A conspicuous example is that of the pre-independence Congress Working Committee. Its members were leaders because they were servants and the Congress President was regarded as India's first servant.

Thus in the *Gram Raj* order of affairs, the society would be समरस ( one fluid ) or a homogeneous unit in which every member would be participating in the joys and sorrows of others. Differences or disputes would be, if they arise at any time, settled by the village people among themselves. And as Vinoba one day remarked :

> " There is *Gram Raj* where differences are solved in the village itself; there is *Ram Raj* where differences do not arise at all. "

Thus Vinoba's *Gram Raj* is a prelude to Bapu's *Ram Raj*. *Swaraj* we have had. Vinoba calls upon us to establish *Gram Raj* through the medium of Bhoodan and Sampattidan. The issue of Government doing or undoing something is beside the point. Let the people produce the requisite *Jan–Shakti*,

they would be able to bring down the stars, let alone the Government. But the first step is Bhoodan and people's resolve to abolish private ownership of land. All else will follow in due course. Says Vinoba :

> "If people decide once for all that all people have a right to land and it cannot be the property of a few, the key to open the locks of the Government is in their own hands. I wish to unlock it by a key and not break it by a hammer. And so if you will all help me in this mission we can achieve success and establish equality or *Samya Yoga*."

## CHAPTER XVII

# WAY TO WORLD PEACE

Writing in his *Young India* in 1928, Gandhiji observed :

> "According to me the economic constitution of India and, for the matter of that, of the world, should be such, that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realised only if the means of production of the elementary necessaries remain in the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are or ought to be; they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. Their monopolization by any country, nation or any group of persons, would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of destitution which we witness today not only in this unhappy land but in other parts of the world too."

Prophetic words indeed, as true today as when they were written ! In our own country, though free, the rich continue to grow richer and the poor poorer, and the gulf between the two is widening. So also in several other parts of the globe. Despite plentiful production, a handful of people are denying the masses the barest necessities. Thinking themselves of a superior stuff, destined to over-lord and command, they ride rough–shod over the interests of the teeming millions. Intoxicated with power, they may cast off their extra food-loads into the sea but they refuse to part with them at such prices as may be within the reach of the needy. Naturally they loose others' sympathy and live in constant fear; fear (from within) of those whom they

suppress or crush for their own benefit, fear (from without) of those who are given to a like business. Thus at a time when the people of the world ought to have been fearlessly behaving as members of one common family, they are divided into two or more blocs or camps and one does not trust the other. Nay, this distrust gets swollen day after day resulting in the feverish preparation for wars and yet greater wars in which, curiously, the financial prelates and potentates, remaining at home, direct the innocent masses for slaughter. Consequently, amidst the plenty of today, fear-complex reigns supreme and the guiltless go to the wall.

Consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or otherwise, we, the seemingly most intelligent creatures on this planet, are getting coiled up in a vicious circle. The more we try to run out of it the more we find ourselves entangled in it and the more we find ourselves entangled in it the more we try to run out of it. Getting anchored in colourful and transient nothings, we look out for security which we purchase by submission to the social standard. This costs us the integrity of our life—human life—which we violate and render ourselves opaque to eternal values. But as our purpose, so our life. Man has, therefore, gone cheap and manhood cheaper still. Man is, as it were, no more the leader of things around. He is but a tool led by them. And to whither ?—he knows not.

The world seems to be heading towards a disaster. Or, at any rate, its progress seems to have been held up. Perhaps this led an English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, to observe : "I am now convinced that no great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible, until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought." But, "thought without action", as Romain Rolland, the French seer and savant, remarked, "is abortion and treachery." The civilization of man has, therefore, reached such a crisis as calls for a re-consideration of basic values and a drastic change in the way of life.

Even a cursory glance over the world stage shows that our common, innermost ailment is attachment, *i. e.*, the more

we have the more we desire. Our lust for possession or appropriation honours no code and is never satisfied. This is the real root of the trouble. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan puts it :

> " The fundamental social crime is appropriation in any form whatever, class privilege, race discrimination or national egotism, for it involves pain to others."

There is no answer to Wordsworth :

> 'Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'

But we do blend it, whence all this misery and war, hunger and poverty, famine and death. What is the way out ? How to get out of it ? Which way to peace ?

Einstein, the most celebrated among our scientists, opines :

> " The fate of the human race was more than ever dependent on its moral strength to-day. The way to a joyful and happy state is through renunciation and self-limitation everywhere. "

He adds :

> " I am absolutely convinced that no wealth in the world can help humanity forward, even in the hands of the most devoted workers in the cause. The example of great and pure character is the only thing that can produce fine ideas or noble deeds. Money always appeals to selfishness and always tempts its owners irresistably to abuse it. "

It reminds one of what Jesus said to the rich man, about two thousand years ago, " Yet lackest thou one thing; sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. " Finding the rich man disconsolate, Jesus spoke the immortal words :

> " How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God ! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. "

Offering a solution rooted in the spiritual past and entrenched in the scientific present, Vinoba makes the following appeal :

> " Those who have must look upon those who have not as a mother looks upon her hungry child. She feeds it before she feeds herself; she starves before she allows it to starve. Let those who possess the strength, skill and knowledge of producing wealth, or the power of holding it, dedicate them to the service of the poor. I desire that the love necessary for doing this be generated in the heart of every one."

He demands one-sixth ( or more ) of the land or property or wealth one may earn or own. He does not demand it as a charity but as a regular contribution of every individual-taker to the all-giver society. As stealing is a sin, Vinoba goes further to make us realize that collection is as much a sin and is the main factor responsible for the sorry plight we are all submerged in. With a humility all his own, he says :

> " This Bhoodan Yagna is an application of non-violence, an experiment in transformation of life itself. I am only an instrument in the hands of Him, who is the Lord of all Ages, like even those who give and those who will receive the gifts. It is a phenomenon inspired by God."

When Vinoba demands everybody to contribute his or her quota to the Bhoodan or Sampattidan, he is simply following the dictates enjoined by the various religions.

Says the Bible :

> " Whatever therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. "

The Prophet of Islam preached :

> " Whosoever surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good, he verily hath grasped the firm hand-hold. "

Also the Hebrew injunction is :

> " To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me ?....Bring no more vain oblations. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings. Learn to do well. "

Again Buddha warned us :

> " A fool brings grief on himself with the thought : 'This son is mine, this wealth is mine.' How can he, if he does not even belong to himself, be the possessor of a son or wealth ? "

And the Gita declares :

> " The righteous men who eat the residue of the sacrifice are freed from all sin, but the wicked who cook for themselves eat sin. "

Both as a religious duty and scientific necessity, Vinoba, through Bhoodan and *Samapattidan*, calls upon the way-laid humanity to mark a halt in its present drive and turn towards building an *Aparigrahi* ( अपरिग्रही or non-collecting ) society based on the twin principles : ( i ) Land, property or wealth to be owned by the community ; ( ii ) He who eats must do productive work regularly.

Thereby Vinoba seeks to alter the very basis of the current economic system and render fundamental changes in our mode of thought and living. No more, then, will a few men be able to amass treasures at the expense of the weak, no more the dreadful socio-economic disparities and no more the beastly disregard for physical labour. Class differences would go and a harmonious, homogeneous society be established in its stead. States or provinces would be economically self-sufficient and politically self-reliant. Each would get according to his or her need and work according to his or her capacity. Then and only then would the foundations of peace be well and truly laid.

Besides, Vinoba proposes to bring about a basic revolution in the science and art of revolution itself. With private

ownership gone and resources of production collectively owned, this steals the thunder of many a violent conflict. So far violence has been the main instrument of revolution. It need not be necessarily so. In Vinoba's words :

> " We want to overhaul the entire social structure without recourse to violence, that is, we want both peace and revolution. Revolution is indispensable. Now if we want peace also, then we have to prove that peace too has the power to revolutionize the society—not gradually but with the speed of a revolution. If this is proved violence will cease to be the indispensable adjunct of revolution and society will be saved. This is what we call a peaceful revolution or Satyagraha.
>
> " Through Bhoodan we are helping the people to acquire the power of Satyagraha and develop faith in humanity. We also desire to manifest the power of peace for solving all our problems. Viewed in this perspective, Bhoodan work will reveal its distinctive glory. "

The secret of Bhoodan lies in evolving not only a new economic arrangement but also in laying up lines to secure political liberty for every citizen, or raising up a religious democracy where the man on the street would command as much say as the tallest in the land. Again, not relying on violent power or coercive force of the State and working its way through popular opinion alone, this new democracy which one may call ' *humanocracy* ', would be making the world really safe for humanity. Eliminating the poisonous elements of the so-called democracies of the West, this *humanocracy* would pave the way for the blooming up of the best in every human being and flowering up of people's true republics combining morals and ethics, politics and economics, theory and practice, all in one complete whole. No other movement in the world today strives to strike the human malady at so deep a root and save the man from his impending ruin. Vinoba shows for all time that economic issues can be tackled by kindly and non-violent means and social structures reared up on purely

humanitarian basis. The war-mad world may ignore his message today, but if man is to live he cannot but adopt it tomorrow or the day after. That the torch-bearer of this new light should be Gandhi's own disciple and spiritual son with India as his laboratory is worthy both of India and the cause.

For us in India, even grounds of expediency demand, let apart high principles, that Vinoba's method must be given a fair trial and co-operation. With starvation facing us and unemployment stalking all round, only the course of decentralised self-sufficiency can get us out of the wretched circle of reducing our every development to disfigurement and progress to poverty. Also reliance on alien arms and ammunitions will not let us fare better, in case of emergencies, than Japan or France. Just as boycott and non-co-operation were practical methods of facing the British bayonet, so also decentralised self-sufficiency and Satyagraha or non-violent non-co-operation are the practical methods now to meet foes within or without. And we cannot have decentralised self-sufficient units until land, ceasing to be a marketable commodity, goes to every tiller.

There are various peace programmes and activities in vogue from one part of the world to another. But almost all of them try to apportion blame to others and do not go into the depth of the matter. No power in the world is prepared to throw up arms and count on the self-reliant power of its own people. The result is that almost every country is more armed to the teeth to-day than ever before and distrust between nation and nation is sharply rising. Here in India, going from village to village in the countryside of Bihar, Vinoba with a supreme confidence and inexhaustible patience seems to say to all of them :

> 'If you really desire peace trust your neighbour and do unto him as you would be done by.'

Trust first. Laying down arms and self-reliance next. Then a readiness to reshape the economic pattern. These are the three essentials for world peace. But who could take the lead ? Again, the world looks to India which is undergoing the travails of a non-violent revolution whence would emanate love and peace.

## CHAPTER XVIII

# TOWARDS SARVODAYA

In this world of erring mortals the only thing immortal is the dreams its children dream, which to quote the poetess, though ' fleeting, unsubstantial, vain, shadowy as the shadow', yet 'remain'. It is given to some to incorporate those dreams into their life and to live them so as to dissolve their entire self into the same and dream yet more dreams. As one seed eliminates itself to develop into a plant, which yields the fruit and the fruit the seed and the cycle goes on for ever, so also one idea begets another and man thus continuously progresses onwards from darkness unto light and more light. Gandhiji consumed himself for the sake of the long cherished dream of *Swaraj* and sowed the seed of another, *Sarvodaya*, *i. e.*, the greatest good of one and all and not only of the greatest number. He showed how the mightiest political power could be made to quit by a people bent upon self-sacrifice and non-co-operation. In other words, he displayed the efficacy and potentialities of soul force as against coercive or violent force to usher in equality between one man and another. From realisation of *Swarai* to the quest for *Sarvodaya* is thus a natural step which has found its full expression in Vinoba.

We have seen how this quest took Vinoba to Telangana where he struck upon and launched the Bhoodan Yagna programme that has now been accepted all over the country as the base to build the new order which Vinoba calls *Samya Yoga*. Basing its philosophy on the four verses of the *Gita* ( Chap. VI, *Shlokas* 29-32 ), he points out that the three requisites for *Samya Yogi* sooiety are :

1. No power should be dominant in the society; there should only be a discipline of good thought.

2. All faculties of the indivdiual to be dedicated to the

society which must provide the individual with opportunity to growth and development.

3. The moral, social and economic value of all sorts of callings performed honestly according to one's strength should be the same.

Going into its details at one of his post–prayer speeches in Bihar, Vinoba remarked :

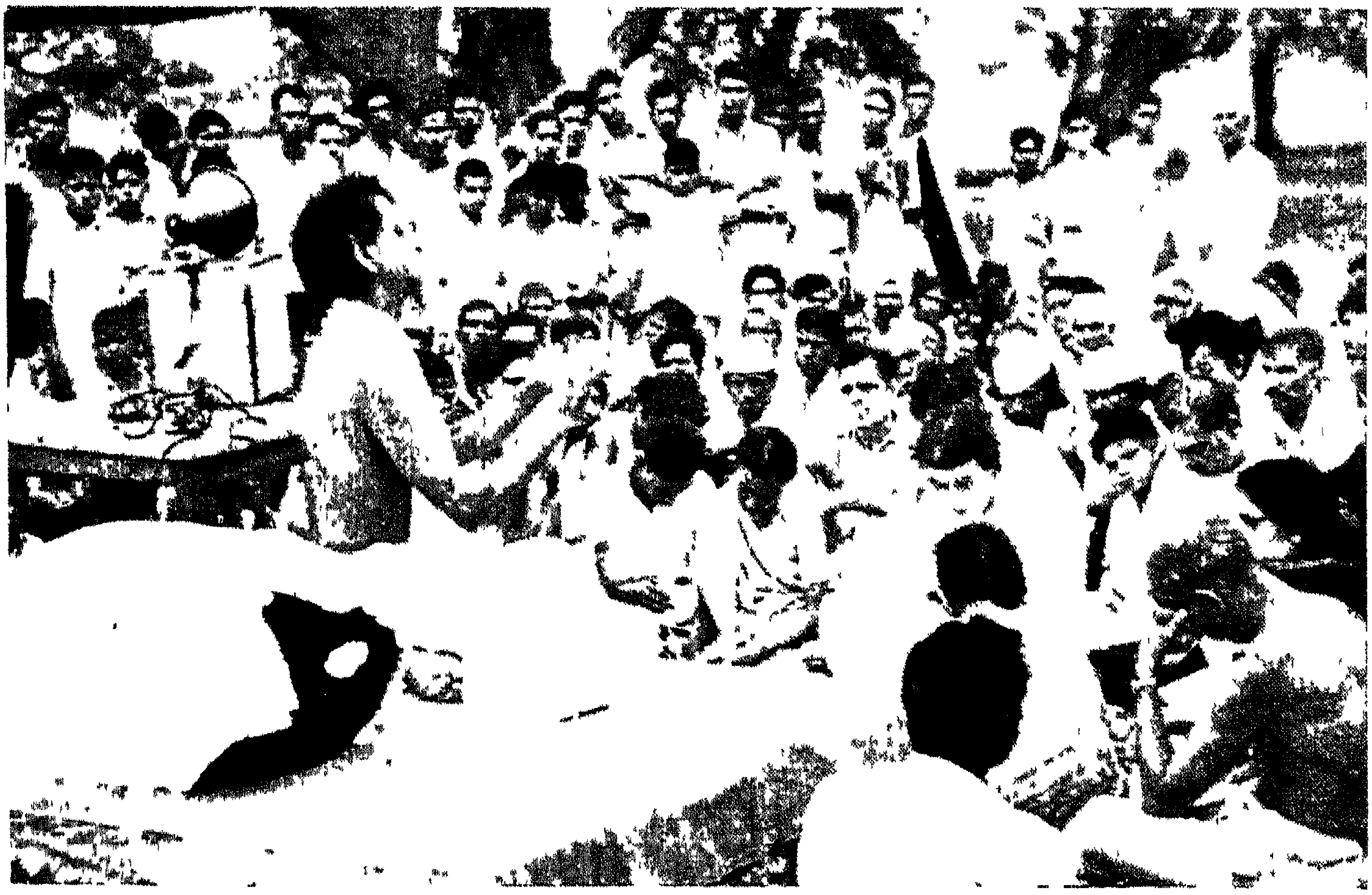
> "*Samya Yoga* holds that therein dwells in every man the same spirit. It, therefore, makes no distinction between man and man. It even goes further and recognizes no ultimate difference in spirit of man and other animals."

Dealing with its revolutionary aspect, he said :

> "People have, upto the present, regarded themselves as owners of wealth they might have. This has produced clash of interests between different groups. I want to replace this idea of the private ownership of wealth in the interest of the society. Acceptance of the trusteeship ideal will transform our entire thinking, our regard to wealth and the relationship between the individual and the society. All that we have is for the service of the society, and not for serving our narrow selfish ends. Indeed, if we would but think of it deeply, real self-interest lies in sacrificing it at the feet of the society. This moral upliftment of the people which *Samya Yoga* brings about, is its distinctive feature."

Referring to the economic sphere, he pointed out :

> "According to *Samya Yoga*, every man who works for the society to the best of his ability, has a right to livelihood. All work which is an act of service to society must carry equal value. The prevailing practice is just the reverse of it. Intellectual work is regarded as superior to physical labour and paid



' The Sampattidan way will turn every house into a bank '

more than the latter. This distinction between intellectual and physical labour is entirely baseless. Everyone must get full opportunity for development.

"The implementation of this view in the economic sphere will help the building up of self-sufficiency in the villages. They will produce all their primary needs, such as, food and cloth, milk and *ghee*, locally. God has made every one of us self-sufficient; that is the beauty of His plan. Every one has intelligence and capacity for work. We want the same kind of decentralisation in the economic sphere. Unless there is economic equality, domination and slavery and consequent distinction of high and low are bound to continue."

In the political sphere :

"*Samya Yoga* will produce equally revolutionary changes in the political sphere too. We want an order of society which will be free not only from exploitation but also from every governmental authority. The power of Government will be decentralized and distributed among the villages. Every village will be a state in itself; the centre will have only nominal authority over them. In this way, gradually, we will reach a stage when authority in every form will have become unnecessary and will, therefore fade away giving rise to a perfectly free society."

And socially :

"In the social sphere also there will be no caste or any other variety of invidious distinctions. He who has the qualification of a *Brahmana* may be entrusted with work suited to his capacity but that will not give him a superior status. In the same way sweepers, scavengers, and cobblers also cannot be regarded as inferior to others, because they render to society a service which is not less valuable than that of the *Brahmana*."

Closing his remarks, he declared :

> " The Bhoodan programme is, as they say, only the thin end of the wedge of all that we want to do. We want to make people free from all attachment to wealth and material things. The Bhoodan campaign is merely the beginning of this long and comprehensive plan. Our ultimate aim is to make land entirely free. There should be not only no individual ownership, but also no national ownership over land. We do not belong to this or that nation but to the world. Air, water ,light and land are direct gifts of God and must belong to the entire humanity."

To fulfill the said 'ultimate aim', Vinoba has, as we have seen, confined himself to Bihar as a test case until its land problem is solved. Going deeper still, he has concentrated on one district of Bihar, Gaya. From obtaining a few thousand acres of land in a small village in the Gaya district of Bihar to the establishment of *Samya Yoga* in the whole of the country, amidst the heat of circumstances as they subsist, seems to be a very long and irksome journey, rather a dream. What is captivating, however, is not so much the final fruit as the determined effort to secure it. It is given to man to go but one step which is his destination in itself. One should regard it also as the last ( for who has seen the whole except Him ? ) and proceed towards it with a zeal and resolve all one's own. Thus shining like a lamp in windless space, it burns with a fire radiating light far and near. This single lamp, in course of time, lights another and more and more till a bright light encompasses the whole and darkness disappears. So goes on Vinoba with an unflinching faith and indomitable courage.

Throughout his arduous march, Vinoba has been the unwearying, enviable Satyagrahi. His penetration into the interior and explaining to the people the real *Dharma* and urging them to do their duty, his insistence on truth and resistance to evil, all this is *Satyagraha*. Unlike the Satyagraha campaigns launched by Gandhiji there is not much excitement in the

present case. One may call the latter as 'acute' ( तीव्र ) form of Satyagraha, while the former as 'gentle' ( सौम्य ). Obviously the suffering involved in 'gentle satyagraha' is no less severe than in the 'acute' one, rather it may be more. But Vinoba does not anticipate either and carries on his work with no cares on his head, having placed them on the broad shoulders of God. In this connection it is worthwhile to recall what he once said :

> "People ask me about Satyagraha. I have only got to say this much that if I can do anything it is only as a Satyagrahi. I believe even to-day ( May, 1952 ) I am offering Satyagraha. To insist on truth, to create atmosphere for it, to undergo maximum suffering to enter another man's heart—all this is a form of Satyagraha. But if, inspite of this, acute Satyagraha would become a necessity, God will surely make you and me offer the same. He is there in the heart of all. As He is inspiring me, He will also inspire you."

The total Bhoodan donations by now exceed 32 lakhs. It is not a big amount to look at but viewed in the perspective in which it has been obtained, it is a proof positive of the influence this gentle form of Satyagraha has produced in the atmosphere of our country. When the entire world is torn with strife and dissensions and our own country is marked with rivalries of caste, creed, untouchability, provincialism, languages, political parties, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, a successful execution of a pledge to collect 25 lakh acres within two years is no mean achievement. Presently when 'All India' outlook is at a discount, this is perhaps the only large scale and solid programme which has an 'All India' out-look and contributes to the integrated solidarity of the nation. Its message has already reached millions of people. It shows readiness, partly if not wholly, of the people to view its implications with sympathy and concern. As has been said earlier, since Bhoodan Yagna is not mere a transference of land from one man to another, but a symbol of the shedding of ownership of land and property and a provision of the supply of

means of production to the producer, it gets a profound import and vital relevance. It presupposes a new human outlook and approach to all problems. It would not be out of place to mention a personal experience in this connection. At a well-populated village in Darbhanga district of Bihar, when, I, together with a friend, approached a well-to-do *zamindar* for donation, he willingly offered. But after the *Dan patra* was signed and we were to take leave of him, he beckoned me to stop and feelingly said, " One prayer ! "

" What please, " said I in amazement.

" Kindly pray for death for me ".

We were stunned. Looking towards his son he repeated, " Kindly pray for death for me. You people may make him ( the son ) turn plough or cut grass, but let mine eyes be closed; I cannot see it. "

" I follow what you say, " with a pause I replied, " but rest assured your son would do more physical work than you and would also lead a life happier than yours. There is no happiness without work. May I beg you to take to a simple work ? Begin spinning on the *charkha*."

"That's right. But how should I bear it all ? "

" You should be glad at this development. We shall all work together, rest together and play together, and be happy," said I. He nodded his head in assent and smiled.

This gives an insight into the feelings of the land-owning class. Old times are changed. Old order is crumbling. A new one has to take its place—but if it be done on a weak and false foundation more harm would be done to our people during the next one or two decades than has been done during the last two or three centuries.

The lines of the new order must be the same as are in keeping with our genius and are native to our soil. Needless to state that 'plans' or 'projects' depending on foreign capital and experts or internal combines shared by foreign

interests would result in throwing us all from the frying pan into the fire. India has to be built from below. But how? I can only reproduce what a seventy-eight years old *kisan* in Darbhanga district told me. When I asked him what, according to him, could actually help us at the present juncture, with a beaming face he replied," Bhoodan is the way to *Sachcha Swaraj* (सच्चा स्वराज or true freedom) and I want to assure you that I would refuse to die until *Sachcha Swaraj* is established!" Who will not bow down in gratitude at so bright a faith?

This is the voice of our India, real India and Bhoodan is the way to build her truly. What is wanting is the number of workers to carry the Sarvodaya message, the robust youths who can act as missionaries in this work. Here is a programme to create a new economic order, a new political order and a new social order and bring in *Sarvodaya.* Our fathers and uncles born in the beginning of this century or earlier did the stupendous task of freeing India from the British yoke. Let us be grateful to them for it and now see to what we can do.

The famished masses at home and the war–fear–ravaged millions abroad look to us with hope and faith. It is ours to be the crusaders of a new order, a new India and a new world. The Bhoodan movement has established that it can show us the way in the deepest gloom we are involved in. Land–distribution is only a minor part of it. Virtually it aims at re–discovering the dormant quality of man and make the same a social force with wide wings. Bhoodan is a march in the further evolution of the human kind. It is just paving the way for the quicker and greater development and prosperity of the society. It is an endeavour to direct man's course from the rails of distrust, aggression and bloodshed to those of trust, self–suffering and love. Bhoodan's is to set up a new world, to create a new man. It has a message for every country, for every citizen of the world. Upon India's youth it enjoins a duty we cannot forego. May we realise it before it is too late!

Vinoba gives the call :

"I appeal to you all to help me. This is revolutionary work I am doing. I want to revolutionize thought, revolutionize the means. The youth has in him the urge for new creation, so say the sages. There is a new world to create, a new mission to do, that I have opened up for you."

## APPENDIX A

# Who Is Vinoba ?

( By Mahatma Gandhi )

He is an undergraduate having left college after my return to India in 1916. He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members. In order to better qualify himself he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialised as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher he has been of the utmost assistance to Ashadevi in her development of the scheme of education through handicrafts. Shri Vinoba has produced a textbook taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realise that spinning is the handicraft par excellence which lends itself to being effectively used for basic education. He has revolutionised *takli*–spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning probably he has no rival in all India.

He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best mind of Islam he gave one year to the study of the *Koran* in the original. He therefore learnt Arabic. He found this study necessary for cultivating a living contact with the Muslims living in his neighbourhood.

He has an army of disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers. Though an utter stranger to medicine this worker has by singlular devotion mastered the method of treatment of lepers and is now running several clinics for their care. Hundreds owe their cure to his labours. He has now published a handbook in Marathi for the treatment of lepers. Vinoba was for years Director of the *Mahila Ashram* ( an ashram for women) in Wardha. His devotion to the cause of *Daridranarayan* (the God of the poor) took him first to a village near Wardha, and now he has gone still further and lives in Paunar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villagers through the disciples he has trained.

He believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villagers is impossible without the constructive programme of which khadi (handspun, handwoven cloth) is the centre. He believes that the charkha ( spinning wheel ) is the most equitable outward symbol of non–violence which has become in integral part of his life. He has taken an active part in the previous Satyagraha (non-violent civil disobedience ) campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the back-ground is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform. And he thoroughly believes that non-violent resistance is impossible without a heart belief in and practice of constructive work.

APPENDIX B

# Sevapuri Resolution

The Sarvodaya Samaj aims at the establishment, on the basis of truth and non–violence, of a classless and casteless society in which there is no exploitation and everybody gets full opportunity for individual growth and development. The main issue before us is to devise ways and means to proceed towards this object in the face of the economic inequality rampant in the country. The Bhoodan Yagna movement, inspired and led by Vinobaji, has provided a solution for it in ample measure. Demonstrating the efficacy of non–violence, this movement has enlivened again our faith in non–violence. We are glad to note that the movement has of late attracted the attention not only of this country but also of those abroad.

As desired by our workers and countrymen, it is but meet that this movement is carried on with redoubled zeal and vigour under the direction of the Sarv Seva Sangh. Shri Vinobaji is also of the view that instead of confining the movement to his personal efforts alone it should be made nation–wide. The Sarv Seva Sangh, therefore, feels called upon to take up this responsibility on its shoulders under the leadership of Shri Vinobaji.

The fundamental principle of the Bhoodan Yagna movement is that all children of the soil have an equal right over the Mother Earth, in the same way as those born of a mother have over her. It is, therefore, essential that the entire land of the country should be equitably redistributed anew, providing roughly at least five acres of dry land or one acre of wet land to every family. The Sarvodaya Samaj, by appealing to the good sense of the people, should prepare their minds for this equitable distribution and acquire within the next two years at least 25 lakhs of acres of land from about five lakhs of our villages on the rough basis of five acres per village. This land will be distributed to those

landless labourers who are versed in agriculture, want to take it, and have no other means of subsistence.

## CHANDIL RESOLUTION

Last year, at Sevapuri, the Sarv Seva Sangh pledged its support to the Bhoodan Movement and decided to collect 25 lakhs of acres of land within two years. One year is now over and we have only been able to collect seven to eight lakh acres of land. Still when we remember how deep man's attachment to land is and how little faith the people and the majority of workers had in the beginning, we will have to admit that securing seven to eight lakh acres of land is indeed a surprising achievement.

We are glad that not only big land owners but also a good number of small land owners and poor peasant-proprietors have donated land in this Yagna. This has strengthened our faith. We congratulate them, and are grateful for the response we have received from them. They have purified themselves and have helped in creating an atmosphere conducive to the purity and enrichment of our society.

Various institutions and workers, and many from among the people, have extended their co-operation to us even in the face of difficulties. The Sarv Seva Sangh is grateful to them for this co-operation.

Today we pledge ourselves anew to this great task. We have to collect 17 to 18 lakh acres of land in the next twelve months. For this it is necessary for us to carry on our work with greater devotion and concentration during the coming year. We have to remember too that the objective of the Bhoodan Yagna is not merely to collect 25 lakh acres of land, but to prepare the background for a non-violent revolution and to lay the corner-stone of the structure of a Sarvodaya society. A special responsibility, therefore, devolves on all those who believe in the Sarvodaya philosophy, and more especially, on institutions and workers carrying on constructive work. For, their object is to strive for the establishment of a Sarvodaya society, and it is evident that this

object of theirs cannot be fulfilled without integrating their programme with the effort to bring about a peaceful transformation of our society. The Bhoodan movement is such a dynamic movement for a non-violent revolution, on the basis of which and in integration with which alone, can constructive work and institutions progress towards the fulfilment of their objectives. We, therefore, hope that these institutions and workers will give first place to the Bhoodan Yagna in their programmes of work and see that they not only collect 25 lakh acres of land in the coming twelve months, but create the atmosphere necessary for establishment of a non-exploiting and equalizing society by collecting five crores of acres of land by 1957.

We also appeal to all political and social workers to forget all their differences and to co-operate in the great work of this Yagna.

Our youths are today anxious for a revolution. They must realize that the revolution is already in their midst, and that what has to be done today is to ensure the success of this great revolution, by setting aside all other work and placing their services at the disposal of the Sarv Seva Sangh. Such dedication on the part of the youths of our country can certainly strengthen the revolution and enable it to take firm roots in the soil.

In conclusion, we appeal to landowners, especially to big landowners, to realize that this Yagna will be beneficial to them too, since Sarvodaya which this Yagna wants to usher in, means the well-being of all. We appeal to them, therefore, to work in every possible way to ensure the success of this movement. Up to now only Vinobaji and his co-workers have been going from village to village and house to house asking for land gifts. But the time has now come for landowners to come forward voluntarily and to donate land ; for the new society we seek to build up can only be built up by those who have undergone a change of heart and realized the greatness of the ideals that prompt this Yagna.

Many want the work of redistribution of land to be

completed through legislation. The Bhoodan Yagna does not stand in the way of legislation, but creates an atmosphere favourable to legislation. Still, we believe that the power that the people will acquire if we accomplish this task through a genuine change of heart will be the real basis of a Sarvodaya society.

We hope that all those who have received the message of the Bhoodan Yagna and realised the supreme and inescapable duty of our times will come forward, take part in this Yagna and co-operate in the fulfilment of our pledge without waiting for anyone to go to them, and appeal for land.

APPENDIX C

# Rules and Regulations of Land Distribution

The question is often asked as to how the lands received in Bhoodan are actually distributed among the landless. The question is important and needs to be answered in order to remove the doubts which ignorance in this regard may create in the minds of the sceptics. For example, there are people who are anxious to know whether we who are entrusted with the work of land distribution actually succeed in finding out the really needy from among the poor landless. The suggestion would seem to be that the villages are torn with individual and factional rivalries and honest men who can help in finding the most deserving cases from among the poor for the allotment of land are hard to get. What is then the guarantee that the land distributed would only go to the landless, properly so called—who have nothing else to turn to for their livelihood ? Even assuming that they will get land, how can they profit by it unless they are provided with the agricultural wherewithal ?

These doubts are quite natural and require to be removed. Vinobaji has been answering them from time to time. The Uttar Pradesh Bhoodan Committee has also considered this question and laid down the method of distribution which is now being followed by the workers throughout the province and may therefore be regarded as having stood the test well.

1. The date for the distribution of land in the village which may have been chosen for this purpose is fixed several days in advance and is announced to the people of that and the neighbouring villages seven days before the date of actual distribution, by beat of drum. Efforts are also made to approach the people personally and inform them of the programme. The announcement is repeated a day before the date of distribution.

2. During the seven days preceding the distribuiion, the distribution workers inspect the donated land, study its fertility and decide the acreage necessary for the maintenance of a peasent family. They also request the head of the local *gram-panchayat* and the *patwari* to accompany them and help them in the inspection and the appraisal of the fertility of the land concerned.

3. The information regarding the date and the place of the distribution is sent to the District Magistrate and other officials concerned with it, the intention being that he or his representative and the *patwari* may be present in the meeting and give to the organizers the benefit of their help.

4. On the distribution day the entire population of the village gather together at the appointed spot. The donors are also present. Then someone from the workers makes a short speech explaining the ideology of the Bhoodan, the method of distribution and the policy underlying it. Next, the landless among the present are asked to stand up. Some of them may not stand up on account of shyness. The organizers, therefore, take care to repeat the request until all of them show up. Since they are all local people who know one another, there is hardly any room for a landholder passing himself off as landless. Besides, the *patwari* is there to point out who are the real landless.

5. The landless can be divided into three classes :

(*a*) Agricultural labourers who have no other means of earning their livelihood and who work on the land of others, ( *b* ) those who have taken to other occupations but would like to revert to cultivation because the occupations in which they are engaged are insufficient to support them, ( *c* ) those who have very insufficient lands and no other occupations and who are, therefore, very poor.

6. The first preference in the distribution of lands is given to the class ( *a* ) landless, next come the poor cultiva-

tors belonging to class ( *c* ) . The rest of the land, if any, is allotted to class ( *b* ) .

7. However there might be villages where the number of landless of even the first group may exceed the land available for distribution. That makes distribution difficult. Under the situation the responsibility for picking out the most deserving persons from them is placed on the landless themselves. If they cannot decide it, lots are drawn and land is allotted accordingly.

The Bhoodan Workers act merely as witnesses. The persons going to receive land having been settled, they are asked to sign a printed application purporting to be a request for land, after which they are presented with certificates of having received land. This certificate is signed by the representative of the District Magistrate ( the *patwari*) and the chairman of the village *panchayat*. The workers have to take care that the certificates are duly filled in and distributed to to the recipients of land.

8. The whole procedure is gone through without any fee being charged from the recipients.

9. The lands received should be cultivated by the recipient himself for at least a period of 10 years, and the cultivation should start within 3 years from the date on which he received it. Failing that, it may be taken back from him and given to some other man.

10. We aim at giving a *bigha* of land for every individual in the family.

This is the method of distribution followed by the workers in our province. In case of a difficulty not covered by the above, the workers are to solve it in consultation with the people of the village, taking into consideration the local conditions.

(By courtesy : Sri A. K. Karan,
Secretary, U. P. Bhoodan Committee)

APPENDIX D

# State Legislation Concerning Bhoodan Yagna

The Hyderabad, the Uttar Pradesh and the Madhya Pradesh State Governments have enacted and other States are taking steps to enact laws to facilitate the activities in connection with the Bhoodan Yagna initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

The principal provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Bhoodan Act are as follows :—

1. Incorporation of Bhoodan Yagna Board to administer all lands vested in it for the benefit of the Bhoodan Yagna.

2. All lands received in the Bhoodan Yagna to vest in the Board.

3. The Board will consist of the chairman and six more, but not exceeding ten, members to be nominated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

4. The Board shall have its own fund and may accept grants, donations, gifts or loans from the Central or State Governments or Local Authority or any individual or body whether incorporated or not.

5. The Board may, for any Tahsil or Taluq, constitute Tahsil Committee consisting of not less than three and not more than seven members.

6. The donor of land will submit an application, in a prescribed form, to the Board which the Board shall forward to the Revenue Officer.

7. The Revenue Officer, after summary enquiry, shall issue a notice inviting objections, if any.

8. If the application for the gift is accepted the interest of the donor stands extinguished and the land vests

in the Board. The person aggrieved has right to go to the civil court.

9. Lands vesting in the Board are not liable to attachment or sale in execution of a decree or order passed by civil court against the Board.

10. The Board shall have power to lease out the land vesting in it.

11. The Tahsil Committee or, where no Tahsil Committee is formed, the Board shall distribute the land vesting in the Board to landless persons, landless person meaning a person holding no land or holding land less than the area prescribed by rules.

12. The person, to whom the land will be allotted, will be recorded, as a Bhoodan lessee and shall hold the land on the terms and the conditions that :—

The lease–hold rights shall, on the death of the holder, pass to his heirs;

The lessee shall not transfer any interest in the land;

The lessee shall not sub–let the land;

The lessee shall not allow the land to lie fallow for a period in excess of two years;

The lessee shall comply with any condition which the Board may impose by regulations.

This arrangement to remain in effect for ten years.

13. Arrears of lease money shall be recoverable in the same manner as arrears of land revenue.

14. The gift under the Bhoodan Yagna will be exempt from payment of Stamp Duty and from Registration or Attestation.

(By courtesy : Sri Shrikrishnadas Jaju, Chairman, Madhya Pradesh Bhoodan Board.)

APPENDIX E

# Pledge of Sampattidan Yagna

Sri Vinobaji,

With a view to the furtherance and fulfilment of the economic revolution, which in its non-violent working follows the best traditions of our country, you have enjoined that in addition to land, people should now come forward to donate a sixth of their wealth and property also. This throws open the door to those also to associate themselves with your sacred mission, who could not do much so far because they did not possess land. In response to this call in the cause of *Daridranarayana*, I surrender the....th of my income to you and undertake to devote the same every year to social welfare work in such manner as you may desire me to do.

I will continue to send in regularly the annual account of my income to you or to the agent or body which you may empower for the said purpose.

I accept the responsibility of keeping whatever amount of money may accrue to the donated share in safe custody and to spend it according to your instructions.

To this pledge, willingly undertaken, I, as the *Antaryami* (अंतर्यामी) *i. e.*, the Inner Guide in me, am myself a witness. I am conscious that I have to be faithful to my *Antaryami*.

May God help me.

Attached herewith please find the statement of my wealth and property.

Date : Sd.

Full Name :

Address :

## APPENDIX F

# Land Collected upto March 25, 1954

| No. | Province | Sevapuri quota (in Acres) | Land collected upto March 25, '54 (in Acres) | Number of *Dan-Patras* (Gift-deeds) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bihar | 4,00,000 | 15,30,000 | 1,57,257 |
| 2 | Uttar Pradesh | 5,00,000 | 5,02,698 | 14,310 |
| 3 | Rajasthan | 2,00,000 | 3,12,720 | 1,583 |
| 4 | Hyderabad | 1,00,000 | 83,035 | 3,274 |
| 5 | Orissa | 1,50,000 | 67,165 | 21,728 |
| 6 | Madhya Pradesh | 1,00,000 | 65,684 | 12,000 |
| 7 | Madhya Bharat | 1,25,000 | 60,757 | 4,799 |
| 8 | Saurashtra | 50,000 | 26,500 | .... |
| 9 | Gujarat | 75,000 | 26,277 | 2,917 |
| 10 | Tamilnad | 1,50,000 | 21,015 | 3,204 |
| 11 | Kerala | 25,000 | 17,000 | 1,200 |
| 12 | Maharashtra | 1,00,000 | 11,963 | 769 |
| 13 | Andhra | 1,00,000 | 11,049 | 552 |
| 14 | Delhi | 10,000 | 9,245 | 249 |
| 15 | Vindhya Pradesh | 40,000 | 4,963 | 823 |
| 16 | Punjab | 1,00,000 | 4,205 | 1,327 |
| 17 | Mysore | 1,00,000 | 3,269 | 1,275 |
| 18 | Karnatik | .... | 1,669 | 193 |
| 19 | Bengal | 2,00,000 | 1,525 | 994 |
| 20 | Himachal Pradesh | .... | 1,377 | 66 |
| 21 | Assam | 25,000 | 1,349 | .... |
| | | 25,50,000 | 27,63,465 | 2,28,520 |

APPENDIX G

# The Bodh-Gaya Sarvodaya Conference

The sixth annual session of the Sarvodaya Samaj was held at Sarvodayapuri, within a stone's throw of the world-renowned religious abode called Bodh–Gaya, on April 18, 19 and 20, 1954. The Sammelan was presided over by Shrimati Asha Devi Aryanayakam, the distinguished educationist and exponent of Gandhiji's *Nai Talim*. It was attended by more than five thousand persons coming from different parts of the country. It met on the grounds of a luxurious mango grove, in extraordinarily simple, elegant and rural surroundings. Except for a waist–high dais there was nothing spectacular and but for the microhone everything was home–made.

The Sammelan commenced in the afternoon of 18th April, with an all-religions' prayer. In a few words, Sri Gauri Shankar Saran Singh, convener of the Reception Committee, offered the gathering a hearty welcome. The Secretary of Sarvodaya Samaj, Sri Shankarrao Deo, requested Smt. Asha Devi to take up the task of conducting the deliberations. Touching Vinoba's feet and taking his blessings, she expressed her acceptance of the same. Next came Sri Vallabhswami, the Joint–secretary of Sarvodaya Samaj, who gave a brief review of the work done during the past one year and expressed the hope that the Sammelan would contribute to make us all stronger and purer. As he was closing there arrived Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, accompanied by the Bihar Governor and the Chief Minister. Sri Vallabhswami garlanded the two distinguished guests with hand-spun yarn. Then the president requested Vinoba to address the conference.

Vinoba began with a Vedic prayer : 'We may grow, one in mind, one in heart, one in purpose.' Referring to the present situation of the country, he expressed his horror at the aggravation, on account of elections, of casteism and commu-

nalism—the twin evils which have been the constant targets of attack of all our patriots and reformers from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Gandhi. He inquired whether crisis was a pre-requisite for fostering united and harmonious action and whether the prevalent multitude of differences in the country were not enough to warrant the same. He refused to believe that if gentlmen ( सज्जन ) sat together they would not be able to chalk out a common programme. Next, tracing the origin of Bhoodan Yagna, Vinoba observed that it might not succeed in solving all the issues before us but it definitely possessed the strength to bring hearts together. During the last three years had been created a new climate of public opinion that land could not be regarded as personal property. Likewise, said Vinoba, ownership of all wealth vested in the society. One must feed others before taking his own food. Vinoba contended that as the thirsty should be provided with water, the cultivator should be provided with land. He could imagine a man being refused entry in a temple; but he could not think of one being refused land for work. Vinoba then turned on to the basic necessity of introducing spinning in the country. Just as in England everybody knows swimming and boating, spinning should be universal in India. Vinoba reiterated with emphasis his demand for imparting spinning instruction to every citizen. Concluding, he said that though we had secured the objective of collecting 25 lakhs of acres within two years, we were but nothings. With his characterstic humility, he appealed to Pandit Nehru to show them the way ( मार्गदर्शन, marg-darshan ).

Pandit Nehru, at the very outset, confessed that he had not come to show them the way but to understand and learn. The problems before us were many, in fact they were 36 crores. He acknowledged that communalism was on the increase, but it was not so easy to do away with elections in democracy. Coming to Bhoodan, Jawaharlalji remarked that it offered a revolutionery method of solving the land problem. But he was afraid that if the Government intervened therein, its form and character would be altered. He expressed his accedance of the principle of spinning. But there too we had to fit

in with the new world of technology. Dilating upon the international situation, Pandit Nehru affirmed that we of India could rely not on armed might but on our inner strength alone.

The philosopher-statesman of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan spoke next. He observed that the Bhoodan movement would not only bring about an agrarian revolution in the country but also lead to the dissolution of caste barriers. Quoting Aristotle, he said that one must live before one can live well. Sound physique—beauty, radiance and invulnerability—was an essential requisite. As regards untouchability, he said that its practice was but doing violence to the dignity of man, which was a great sin. No religion permitted it. With lucid quotations from the scriptures of various religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam—he pointed out that *Dharma* was that which brings society together, while *Adharma* breaks it asunder. Social coherence was the need of the hour. Finally, Dr. Radhakrishnan hoped that land legislation and abolition of caste prejudice would lead to the betterment of society.

Then they all shifted to the prayer ground where more than a lakh of people had already assembled. In his post-prayer address, Vinoba declared that anybody who did not donate land was a traitor to the country. There should be as many donors in Bihar as there are landholders. He said that he had spent 19 months in Bihar and called upon its people to respond to his call of 32 lakhs. Then Pandit Nehru rose to address the gathering. He severely denounced casteism and remarked that Bihar, of all States, suffered from this curse most and its heat reached even Delhi. What was needed was greater integration of hearts, otherwise forces like those of Hydrogen-bomb could not be successfully met. Pandit Nehru entreated the people to rise above mutual differences and build a new India.

On the 19th, the Sammelan met in the morning for a combined spinning programme for half an hour. Then there was a departure from the usual routine. In place of having a joint discussion, work was divided up into five groups :

(i) Growth and development of Bhoodan, (ii) Problems of land-distribution, (iii) Training of workers, (iv) Sampattidan Yagna, and (v) Village reconstruction and Nai Talim. The group deliberations continued upto 11-30 a.m. In the afternoon session, the conveners of the Bhoodan committees of some States gave an idea of the work done in their States. The saga of Mangroth, a village in Hamirpur district of U. P., whose entire land was donated to Vinoba by its inhabitants in May, 1952, was also briefly told. The members of the *Sarvodaya Mandal* of Mangroth, *i.e.*, a 16-member committee of Mangroth villagers to which Vinoba has entrusted the charge of Mangroth management, also presented themselves before the Sammelan. Then followed perhaps the most outstanding event of the Sammelan—the address of Sri Jayaprakash Narayan.

Jayaprakash Babu expressed his regret, a Bihari as he is, at the sad fact that Bihar had not yet fulfilled Baba's (as Vinoba is known in the countryside) demand. He felt certain that Bihar could do it. But neither the members of the Congress Party nor those of the Praja Socialist Party, both of which had passed resolutions supporting Baba's call for 32 lakhs of acres, had taken up the work with proper zeal and spirit. He added that personally his faith in the efficacy of the movement was growing day by day. Law could not unite hearts. Nor could any Party pass a law making land a social property. Of course, that could be done by the sword, but sword gave rise to more problems than it solved. Sri Jayaprakash pleaded for speedy action as urgency was essential and time waited for none. He said that the paramount need was to dedicate one's whole life to this cause and he called upon his countrymen, specially the youth, to come forward and donate their life to it, *Jiwan Dan* (जीवन दान or gift of life). He closed with the solemn announcement of offering himself for the cause.

In a slow, moving tone Vinoba warmly appreciated Sri Jayaprakash's resolve. He was sure that as the Bhoodan movement succeeded it would also be able to transform the life of many persons. He regretted that constructive workers

had not yet cast off their mutual ill-will and suspicions. Could they work with a broad vision and large heart, added Vinoba, as the members of one family called the Gandhi family, they would not only find new workers joining them but would also ennoble their own life. He urged upon them to work with as firm a resolve as that of Jayaprakash Bubu.

These two speeches turned the tone of the Sammelan and gave it an awful solemness. The very air of Sarvodayapuri was changed. The evening prayer meeting was addressed by Acharya J. B. Kripalani. He said that Gandhiji's Constructive Programme must be taken as a whole. Like a vigil, he gave the warning that Bhoodan alone was not enough and a mere collection of five crores acres of land and their distribution would not serve the purpose. The whole standing structure had to be taken into account and revolutionized. Hence, argued the Acharya, politics could not be overlooked. Either they would have to go into it or control it. He also expressed his pleasure at Sri Jayaprakash's decision to dedicate himself to Bhoodan cause—a decision which tempted him also. But much heart-searching and purity, Kripalaniji pointed out, were required for such dedication. Our ambitions, rivalries, etc. must all go before we took such a bold step.

On the third day, the 20th, came the climax. After morning spinning, the president, Smt. Asha Devi announced that Sri Jayaprakashji had sent her lwo letters – one his and the other from Vinoba. She read them out. Sri Jayaprakash's letter said :

> " I enclose a letter received from Baba. I have no words to comment on the donation of life to a small fry like me by a man who has inspired us all. I shall say only this that I am totally unfit for accepting such an invaluable donation. On the contrary we have to donate our life in the name of God to Baba himself. Yours in humbleness, Jayaprakash. "

Vinoba's letter to JP was as follows :

> " In response to your call of yesterday here is the

offering of my life for a non-violent revolution based on Bhoodan Yagna and with village-industries as its mainstay.—Vinoba."

The whole audience was spell-bound. In pin-drop silence, Smt. Asha Devi Aryanayakam, the president, offered her entire self for the great cause. Then came Sri Dhirendra Majumdar who said that with some diffidence he also offered himself for the same. The diffidence was that donation did not mean a mere speeding up of the land collection programme but a discarding up of old values in every sphere of life. It meant a dedication to new, human values and giving oneself up to the building up of a casteless and classless and stateless society. Calling upon the workers to realise its deeper implications, he hoped that a good number of them would offer themselves. Then Smt. Asha Devi requested Sri Jayaprakashji to read out the various letters of dedication. This took up the whole morning.

In the afternoon session, the last sitting of the Sammelan, the conveners of various sections gave a brief resume of the discussions held the previous morning. Then came the main resolution—the only resolution—of the Sammelan, read out by Sri Shankarrao Deo. Expressing joy at the collection of 26,15,101 acres from 2,37,022 donors within two years, the resolution affirmed that the underlying idea was not to collect or distribute land but to build up an exploitation-free and classless society. It asked all those who were anxious to establish human values in the society to come ahead and devote themselves to make the movement a success. In a reasoned speech, Sri Shankarraoji explained the secret and significance of the resolution. He finished saying that the message of this Sammelan was that life itself was a Yagna.

Next Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India, who had arrived while the resolution was being read, addressed the gathering. He said that three years ago he had written an article in Hindi, entitled 'Asamanjas' (असमंजस or confusion) not meant for publication, at the then strange condition of the country. Curiously, the same word, added Rajendra Babu

appeared in the resolution put forth· But thanks to the progress of Bhoodan Yagna, the clouds of confusion had very much disappeared from his mind. He also referred to the Khadi and Village Industries Exhibition being held at Delhi. The life-donation (*Jiwan Dan*) scene had further increased his faith and he hoped that new India, thus built on solid foundations, would be able to hold her own in the world.

Then came the valedictory address of Vinoba. Referring to *Jiwan Dan*, he drew pointed attention to Acharya Kripalani's warning. He said that the meaning of new resolve was life purfication. It gave us all an opportunity to take to incessant self-criticism. Next he dilated on *Dharma*. He asked the workers to recognise the '*Param Dharma*' and not keep themselves involved in the old, insipid *Dharma*. Also he expressed his acceptance of the conclusions reached at by Kripalaniji yesterday with regard to politics. He agreed that political structure must be altered. But he said that he need not take the trouble of holding its reins himself, they would be held by those who would do his bidding. He also remarked that one of the causes of the change produced during the past three years was the creation of *Jan-Shakti* founded by Bhoodan Yagna. He claimed that the raising up of required popular strength would change the whole administration and help in the establishment of *Shasan-mukta* (शासन मुक्त or administration-free) society. So he called upon Acharya Kripalani to offer himself in the task. He also appealed to all political workers to cast off their differences and take to producing *Jan-Shakti* through the common medium of Bhoodan. That would, concluded Vinoba, convert our politics (*Raj-Niti* or राजनीति) into popular politics (*Loka-Niti* or लोकनीति)

The Sammelan then came to a close. No account of it can be complete without a reference to Vinoba's new dream *Samanvaya Ashram*, an institution seeking a harmonious blending of the Vedanta of the Upanishads and the non-violence of Buddha. It would be an international meeting ground of all religions, cultures and spirits, where man can obtain rest and find peace. Fortunately a plot of about six bighas of land has

been donated to Vinoba for this purpose near the sacred *Mahabodhi* tree. Sri Kaka Saheb Kalelkar, fresh from Japan, explained the functions and significance of such an Ashram in his one hour speech in the morning of the 18th April.

The Bodh-Gaya Sarvodaya Conference would be regarded as a memorable event in the history of our country. It offered a platform where persons with conflicting shades of political opinions could eat, meet and talk together. It confirmed the amenability of the Indian mind to the call of love if invoked in a becoming manner. It indicated the readiness of our youth to dedicate themselves for a cause noble and sublime. It demonstrated India's faith in the efficacy of soul-force and its potentialities to meet all other forces combined. Finally, it showed the immortal spirit of Buddha pervading the air and beckoning us all to the Right Path.

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